

Editor's Foreword:

Once again, I had to change around many things for this volume. Some things were omitted if I couldn't understand them; some things were added in order to improve the flow. Hopefully the overall picture is intact. If you want to check out the original translation you can find it here: <http://shutazen.livejournal.com>

As was the case with the last two volumes, I read through everything twice since I was changing so much as I went. I'm sure I left a few mistakes, sorry about that if there are.

Also, I wanted to make a quick note about the names of Amalgam officials. The text originally had their names set up to repeat three times in some cases, such as: "Mister K (Kalium/Potassium)". To make things a little less cluttered I changed it to just one name. I chose to keep Kalium and Natrium instead of Potassium and Sodium because I thought it sounded better. Sometimes it would just say something like: "Mr. Au". I went ahead and changed those to the full names as well ("Mister Gold") in case some people were less familiar with the elements.

There is also a Whispered girl whose name is a matter of preference. In the original I believe her name is "Kudan Mira" (not sure which is first or last), but in the official translations they changed her name to "Sarah Miller". I decided to go for the second one, but if you see the other name (which I think they use in the Sigma manga translations) know that it's the same person.

On a separate note, I took the cover picture and photoshopped out the text that was over it. I was thinking about doing that with the last two volumes as well but those were a bit more difficult so, sorry. The alternate cover is at the end, like before.

Well, without further ado, enjoy!

~Moonfaerie24

Translator's Foreword:

Well, if anyone is interested, here's Full Metal Panic!: *Approaching Nick of Time*. Took me a little longer to finish this. Well, I do hope everyone can still stomach my crude translations. Again please be reminded that these are quick translations and I have not gone over them, so there are bound to be mistakes on grammar and spelling. Obviously I'm not the type of person who talks a lot. So I'm gonna cut this short and let you enjoy this installment.

Full Metal Panic!

Come Make My Day

By Shoji Gatoh



Translator: Shutazen
Editor: Moonfaerie24

Prologue

It was only 14 hours after the battle in Nickelo, but there had already been three online meetings in Amalgam.

“Then? What is the condition of Mister Silver?”

“In critical condition” Mister Kalium, Kalinin, answered to Mister Gold’s question.

There were no feelings in his words; it was simply a tone of voice which conveyed the truth. It had already been a few months since Mister Gold had began corresponding with the Russian, and he could tell there was no cynicism or jest in Kalinin’s words. He was an effective commander of the Special Forces and an honest warrior who devoted himself to his current situation. He had no interest in politics or money; such was a “Fine Soldier”.

Mister Gold’s had devised a plan to attack his and Leonard’s forces in the name of “support”. He had driven them into a corner. Even if he complained of Gold’s deed at that meeting he knew it would be meaningless. Simply by using conciliation or threats the majority of the management was on Gold’s side.

Mister Kalium continued his report.

“He is currently in the outskirts of Acapulco receiving medical treatment. Even if he was saved there are still prognostic symptoms remaining. He can’t even stand by himself.”

“How unfortunate, for that youth. He was such a great asset.”

Murmuring such, Mister Gold sunk into his seat in the online meeting room. With only voice communication his form could not be seen by anybody else. Even then, he was careful not to slacken the expression of his face.

The management who were in attendance were scattered around the world. Gold was in the Far East- in Tokyo. In one of the rooms in the upper buildings erected in Akasaka. If he walked a few steps coming out of the meeting room, he was in a position to easily look over to see the streets of Nakata in the afternoon from the super bullet proof window.

He was Japanese.

From his face he was a man who held immense political power, at the same time he was a patriot. He strongly regulated the domestic terrorism, definitely not relinquishing control in case an incident should occur. Even if he allowed the Behemoth to go berserk in Tokyo, he would not allow nuclear terrorism. He was also the one who acknowledged the transfer of the Behemoth to the organization called A21, at the same time preparing a “safety switch”. When necessary he would activate the self destruct switch. In Gold’s thinking, he would have it go moderately berserk heading to the city center at dawn, and then have the Behemoth retreat.

The number of “trivial” domestic terrorism incidents that happened in the last year which he had managed to organize were strongly influenced by Japan’s Security Department. Public Safety officials were competent enough to have the responsibility of scrupulously covering it up, attaining the post from their successors through manipulation. Due to external crisis, the dependable opinion of the person was labeled as a “traitor”.

No, practically all his colleagues were traitors. The world consisted of scrambling and cheating each other. The survivor would not superficially gain the wealth. That island country with limited resources... it was a miracle that they had prospered those 50 years while being involved in conflicts. He had the responsibility of having that miracle continue.

For that reason he made effective practical use of Amalgam. Joining in that “Meeting of fixed game”, it was his patriotic deed to make that initiative.

After finishing the detailed reports, Kalinin said, “We are re-organizing our troops, and also his bodyguards and the collection of information regarding the remnants of Mithril.”

“Fine. Where are you now?”

“Still at the hospital in Mexico.”

“Is that so? It’s good that you’re following him. We will also pray for his safety.”

With his words of sympathy, a suppressed laugh was leaked from a number of the management.

“The pursuit of the remnants of Mithril is also being advanced. The aforementioned Submarine has already slipped through the warning network of the United States, and it seemed that they disappeared somewhere in the Pacific. Together with that White Lambda Driver equipped AS. What a troublesome bunch.”

“They will show themselves somehow. It’s because they will resist Amalgam till the end.”

Then one of the management, Mister Natrium, got in between.

“The problem is that white AS. It is similar to the case of the Arbalest right? Destroying three Behemoths in a matter of minutes, it is unexpectedly unbelievable.”

“It’s the truth” Gold said with an ill-humored voice. “But it is regrettable to be surprised. In the combat with the enemy equipped with a Lambda Driver, the Behemoth’s predominance has been destroyed at once. We knew that beforehand.”

The strength of the Behemoth lied in its overwhelming defense. If the Lambda Driver made the defense meaningless, no matter how big it was, it would not be able to withstand the

destructive power of current weapons. After all, it was a unit that trampled down its target.

“Right now the existence of that submarine and white AS cannot be ignored. No matter how we say it- It would be troublesome not knowing when and where it appears. The one in charge of designing the operations is also complaining badly. We have to do something” Mister Natrium said with irritation.

“If the previous information is correct, the only threat would be that one unit alone. Our Codarl is enough to deal with them. We throw at them properly at the proper time.”

“You certainly know the details of military affairs” Kalinin said.

Although ridicule could be heard toward the words of Gold, who was not originally a soldier, he only snorted and settled back.

“The essential point is basically the same in other fields, Mister Kalium. Even in investment, election or trial. You and Mister Silver have read it wrong.”

“I see. That may be so.”

At that moment, for the first time, he could feel a kind of humor in Kalinin’s voice. It could be a self derived nuance, there was a dry cynicism in his words.

“It is certain that we’ve read it wrong. Him and me, about your malicious connivance.”

With that there was a strange turning voice from Mister Copper. In the direction of his speech the indicator above the hologram was flickering busily, aside from the sound of his voice desolate footsteps and a number of gunshots echoed.

“What’s the matter?”

At the same time, on the solid image symbol on the circuit of Mister Tin, there was a sudden strong flickering. There was the

strange noise of a liquid. It was a shot to the head from behind, the sound of the contents of the cranium spilling in front of the desk.....

And then Mister Natrium was begging for his life. The indicator was moving bit by bit, in the direction of his circuit was his breathing, stammering, screaming, expressed inside the inorganic image.

“Wait. Don’t shoot. I have nothing to do with it. Let me explain—”

Gunshot.

Somehow three of the management had gone silent.

The majority of the remaining management were holding their breath in silence. Without stirring and breathing. It was the sound and voice of confirming that the same thing was not happening in their surroundings.

“Suppressed.”

From the circuit of Copper, another voice of a man came out.

“Suppressed.”

From the circuit of Tin, still another voice of a man came out.

“Suppressed.”

From the circuit of Natrium, was the sound of a young girl.

Although they were scattered around the world, three of the management had been killed at the same time. It was most probably the work of Leonard’s subordinates. The three suppressed people, together with Gold, were the leaders of the premeditated murder of Leonard.

“T..this is—”

“I told you didn’t I, Mister Gold? About your connivance.”

Without sound Kalinin slipped to the back of Gold, informing him over his shoulders. The Russian presented him

before his eyes the mobile communication device, cutting the switch off with his thumb, casually placing it in the desk.

“Your guards were already silenced. No help will come.”

Knowing of his own lineage and whereabouts, he could not believe that Kalinin was there. Half a day ago, he had been certain that he was still in Mexico. In any ordinary passenger plane the distance would take 20 hours. In that short amount of time he managed to get to the Far East from South America, also having the vigor to slip through his guards— Unbelievable, really beyond his assumption. His counter was too fast.

“Diet Member Kaneyama Takeshi. He is just the dummy. He moves taking your instructions. And then the real Mister Gold-- in other words you, will be the subject of news tonight.”

“Wait--”

Kalinin, having an acquaintance with bodily destruction, did not use any weapons. With frightening power he drove his face on top of the desk, bringing down his sharp elbow to the back of Gold’s neck like a guillotine.

In an instant the spine was destroyed, the whole body lost all feeling and could no longer move. Like a goldfish his mouth was flapping, what could be heard from the distant consciousness, was the voice of Kalinin informing the remaining management of what happened.

As expected of Amalgam’s management, the remaining ten-odd people returned to calmness. There were people who had expected that tragedy. Grabbing the mike on top of the desk, Kalinin said.

“Mister Gold conspired with the other three; in the name of “support” we were attacked. They tried to erase Mister Silver, and schemed to plunder his wealth. This was the deed of retribution towards that betrayal.are there any objections?”



All agreed at once in silence.

“Fine. ...but as far as I know, I think there remains one person who has not given their agreement. How about it?”

After Kalinin said that, the other party continued to remain patient.

There was no indication that the other party was present in the online meeting, or that he had ever been in attendance.

However, he was there. There was no mistake that he had received information about their circumstances.

With serious internal disturbance in the management, in the case that the problem of the dispute developed-- “He” would definitely appear. If those things occurred, that was.

Essentially Amalgam had no top. It was a network that was connected to each other, an organization with a lenient parliamentary system. However it was not only that, that was not the reason for the preservation of the constituents. A “Manager” was necessary. By no means was his own will shown, nor his appearance seen. He just offered the field to the members and existed to “regulate” the proceedings. Combining the different chemicals, a person designated as “Mercury Alloy (Amalgam)”.

“Mister Mercury” Kalinin said his name. “We wish you to come out. If you continue to be silent, we will reconsider our fundamental trust towards you.”

The image of the online meeting instantly flickered; the color of the participants’ symbols became yellow. It was an indication of a code system which was rarely used. That namely, indicated the access of a third person who was listening to the meeting.

“It seems that there is a problem.” Mercury informed them with a voice that had been electronically changed.

Chapter 1: Wall of Sand

It was already past 1400 hours in the summit of the desert's heat when Martin Estis received a difficult report.

At their base, which made use of the relics of the Marine period, a large enemy force was drawing closer. In their current spot it was confirmed to have 30 Main Battle Tank (MBT) and four 2nd generation Arm Slaves. In addition, they expected the number of enemy forces to increase.

The enemy force was Amalgam. In more accurate terms it was the Military force of Morocco which Amalgam had penetrated. After escaping from the previous Amalgam attack, the surviving military force and a portion of the materials were collected. Estis and the others were questioning the counterattack; the enemy was finally there to crush them.

“Dammit” he grumbled in annoyance, under the crude tent. He breathed in the dry air through his nose.

They were in the Northwestern part of Africa. It was a desert area that connected to the borders of Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the West Sahara. There were no mountain-like mountains in their surrounding area for dozens of kilometers. With the burning sun blazing down on the ground, the distant horizon flickered from the heat haze. Even then, for Estis, he knew full well that he was no longer in Arizona or Nevada.

Their camouflaged tents and barracks were created from a sparse row of pillars, with their runway making use of the cracked natural ground.

Although they had camouflage that deceived the surveillance of a spy satellite, it was too modest to be called a base.

Their military force did not even reach 100 people, and they only had a few 2nd generation ASes.

They even had stock parts for the M6, but although they had the legs they didn't have the hip joint parts, and although they had a torso the cockpit part was entirely lacking. That was their condition.

Even while being amazed that the enemy had discovered their "resistance point", they were more surprised that the enemy would go all the way there just to crush them.

"Oh well. This certainly is an extravagant war for a dilapidated opponent." Estis muttered to Master Sergeant Jima, who had brought the information with shivering shoulders.

"I won't say it's ambitious. The enemy has already considered our combat capabilities."

"Aren't they overestimating us? Then that's an honor."

Formerly, in the small country of Belize in Central America, there was a selection camp for the essential members of Mithril.

Working on the mercenaries who had gathered from around the world, screening carefully their ability aptitude, the remaining people were sent to various combat forces. Estis was the "Principal" of that selection camp. Taking away all exceptions, the Landing force unit members of Mithril's operations usually came out from Estis' camp. It was the same for the trio of the Pacific Ocean fleet-Melissa Mao, Kurz Weber and Sousky Seagal.

With the offensive of Amalgam at the beginning of the year various positions of Mithril in the world were being annihilated one after another. Estis and the others had immediately walked on foot in the swampy area from Belize, hiding themselves. But the limited movement of the tanks, armored vehicles, and even ASes in the swampy land was unavoidable. Escaping in the flesh proved to be advantageous from the pursuit of the enemy. Making use of

the forest and bushes they had managed to hide themselves, even from pursuit by aircraft.

And so they ended their march after three weeks, and they somehow managed to escape to Colombia from the air route of Honduras.

They managed to arrive in Colombia in the city of Medellin, and most of the trainees walked away and returned home. What remained were ten-odd instructors belonging to Mithril, and around four to five curious trainees.

With merely 20 something weak people who couldn't really do anything against a strong Amalgam, Estis and the others worked as a small private military organization in North Africa, and the other allies continued to gather information.

And then a few months after, they linked up with around ten men from Mithril, still without any results of getting ahead. Although the majority of them saw themselves as a small group, it would still be a difficult task to pinpoint their obscure whereabouts. Without getting any contact, the outcome was pessimistic. They didn't seem to have the mood to concentrate. Even Estis himself. His hope of reorganizing was withering; they would most likely continue to live managing a meager private military organization. That was what they were starting to think.

But then, the incident in San Francisco had happened.

Although it was reported in the news as an "explosion incident at the harbor", looking at the fragmentary pictures of the scene, they knew that it was not merely an explosion incident; they had a hunch that it was a battle between ASes.

Master Sergeant Jima and a few subordinates flew to San Francisco had managed to obtain in one day the actual harbor workers testimony and images from observation cameras, and the records from the police's wireless radio. Even without a significant

amount of analysis, they knew that the incident involved a one on one fight between a black M9 and a Venom. In addition, in the middle of the battle, the black M9 received support in the form of a cruise missile from somewhere, and, with a single unit, it had destroyed a Venom.

That black M9 was most probably Ben Clouseau from the underground forces. And then that cruise missile must have been launched- there was no mistake- from that submarine, *Tuatha de Danaan*. Although they hadn't met, it was rumored that they were being lead by a girl with balls of steel.

Knowing that, the agitation of Estis and the others changed greatly.

Those guys from the West Pacific Fleet, they were still living stubbornly. Not to mention that they had dealt a harsh blow to the enemy.

That incident was spread all over the world to the former members of Mithril. The continuation of *Tuatha de Danaan's* resolute resistance was in fact encouraging others, beyond the imagination of Estis. But for Estis, who had reconsidered that "they might be able to retaliate", there were people re-contacting him one after another.

Two months after that, the meager subordinates tripled, and they had managed to setup a base on the verge of the Sahara Desert. The training camp's budget was difficult to recover from the banks in Europe, but they managed the accumulation of necessary goods, and the expansion of their regular combat capability-

Now, the enemy was approaching.

That base that was elaborately concealed in camouflage, although they didn't know how the enemy managed to discover it, it no longer mattered.

In any case the enemy's military force was overwhelming. Even if they wanted to withdraw, if they got away using the surface vehicles they would be seen during pursuit. The personnel and goods transport was still 1200 kilometers away. Even if it was coming to their current location as fast as possible, it would take at least two hours to arrive. And it was impossible to hold out that long.

An extremely disadvantageous battle was about to start.

"How regrettable. I thought that we were doing a lot better."

Estis mumbled.

He was moving about in confusion in the heat of the ground outside the tent, gazing at his subordinates with their wasted efforts in preparation for the coming ambush.

"How unusually timid. Well, with that many opponents it's not unreasonable" Jima said.

"Hmph. Who's timid? Let them show you."

"Yeah. Why don't we get rowdy and loud?"

Exchanging grins without any heroic feelings, Estis grabbed the assault rifle that was close to his hands. Putting on his desert camouflage hat, he went out of the tent. The glaring sunlight tanned his skin. The dry and hot breeze stroked his cheeks. It was like being inside of a dryer. Even though the nights were so cold, the daytime in the Western Sahara was that hot.

After giving instructions to his subordinates, he thought about the penetrating methods of the expected enemy with his binoculars in hand.

With the pale white desert the atmosphere was warped by the hot temperature. That was all he could see.

No- he could see a cloud of dust.

Crossing over the loose sand dunes, one four wheel-drive vehicle was approaching their way. Facing off the irregular land, it

was heading straight with violent speed. The distance was around one kilometer.

“What’s that?”

“Shall we shoot it? We can miss.” said the subordinate inside the nearby trench peeping into the scope of his 50 caliber rifle.

“No. Let’s see who it is.”

It was not possible that it could be a suicide bomber. Looking carefully, the driver could be seen through the windows, shaking his hands at them. At first they did not see the Khaki shirt and black hair, as it got nearer they were able to distinguish the face.

“It’s him” Jima, who had also been one of the instructors at Belize’s training camp, said.

“Who?”

“That guy, the Korean. The guy who passed last year. I’m sure he was sent to the West Pacific Fleet.”

“I don’t remember.”

“Come on, him. The one who wasn’t motivated, yet did things flawlessly.”

“Aah, him. Even though not a show-off, the strange guy who just suddenly passed. There was that one, I’m sure.”

“That’s right. It’s him.”

“What was his name?”

“I don’t know why I can’t recall....Yong or was is Yeng?”

“It’s awkward even if you hear it now. Umm....”

Ordering his subordinates to “don’t shoot”, Estis went out of the trench, followed by Jima and the one who held the rifle in one hand. The four wheel-drive vehicle finally arrived in front of the base, stopping the car 30 meters away from Jima. A young Oriental got out without cutting the engine.

“Lt. Commander Estis, it’s been a long time! I’m glad you’re alright!” the youth gasped, running towards them.

“Ou. Well. What.” Estis said with an uncharacteristically vague attitude towards the other person who he did not know the name.

“The old code method is dangerous so I came here directly. Well, it’s good that I made it in time!”

“Before that, state your name, rank and affiliation! With minimum distinction!”

From the sides Jima raised his voice as a veteran non-commissioned officer. Then the youth, in confusion, stood at attention.

“Please excuse me. Sergeant Yang Jun-Kyu. Affiliated with the West Pacific Fleet, Special Correspondence group. Assuming that Mithril is still present, that is.”

That’s right, Yang, it was Yang. Nice Jima.

“Well let’s leave out the pleasantries. I’m happy that you’re alive, Yang.”

“Ah, thank you.”

“Well, why did you come here? You seem to know that the enemy is approaching this place.”

“Yes, about that-”

At that time, there was a large deafening sound echoing. A sound they knew full well- the sound of shells flying. Close. Immediately after thinking that, the car Yang had ridden exploded and caught fire, flying about 10 meters in the air. The disconnected tire drew a parabola, rolling on the ground.

“Follow me.”

That had been a test shot. And not aimed at the car. In reference to that shot, the artillery troops took note of the horizon,

adjusting alignment by a number of degrees, increasing the natural potent shot. There was no time to be slow.

Estis and the others who bent down on the ground stood up, getting rid of the dust covering their heads and backs. They returned back to the encampment with a short run. Yang was dumbfounded when his own car was hit, but he immediately pulled himself together and followed after.

“Please wait, Lt. Commander-”

“Battle Stations! There is an enemy who controls the guidance of the bombardment nearby! Look for it! Jima, you be the lookout on the west side!”

“Lt. Commander Estis, I still haven’t told you!” Yang called, behind Estis, who was running around the base giving instructions

“Later, I’m busy!”

The corrected shot of the enemy impacted. That time the shot was much closer to the base. It was in the place where Estis and the others were standing. The interior of the base had already prepared for the full-blown bombardment of the enemy, and would be getting noisy. There were people who carried most of the ammunitions into the trench, and people who prepared the firing of the anti tank missiles, and people who boarded the limited number of ASes-

“Incoming!” somebody shouted.

The subordinates simultaneously rushed into the trench. The sky shook, shivering. The sound of the flying shells got closer bit by bit. It was not one shot. It was a number of shots that were incomparable. Ten shots, no, more than twenty shots.

“Lt. Commander, the reason why I’m here is-”

“Shut up!”

Impact approaching.

Estis dived to the nearby trench. He thought of slapping Yang, but there was no need. As expected he was no amateur. Unconfused beside Estis, he slid inside the trench, which was not wide, and covered his ears with his mouth open, preparing for impact.

Impact.

Being the product of experience, they had not grown accustomed to that instant. With the shock of the explosion, their bodies were hit with the heavy sandbags. With no relation to their own will, the air leaked out from their lungs. It was like an electric shock had numbed their craniums, running with burning heat throughout their whole bodies. It was not once, they were attacked many times.

“....Dammit” Estis cursed.

The enemy fire did not once wane.

They confirmed the damage immediately. Because of the trenches the injuries were minimal. However without any defensive measures, the facility, vehicles, and goods were easily destroyed. Usual black smoke and fragments scattered to one side. There were voices screaming for help, the fluttering of the screams of those experiencing the firsthand bombardment in a panic. Someone reported that the enemy tanks were drawing near, and another informed them of their numbers.

“The second wave will be coming soon. It was a careful preliminary”

“L..Lt. Commander....”

Yang crawled out unsteadily from the trench.

“Talk later. You also take a weapon.”

The enemy tank that was getting closer was firing from the haze of the shaking heat. Missing the base in its aim, a large cloud of dust whirled around. Two shots, three shots— on the fourth shot

the unmanned armor vehicle was hit and the burning lump of iron took to the air.

They really weren't showing any mercy.

With that manner, only half of the allies would be able to take on the enemy. Showing authority in front of his subordinates, Estis' heart was no longer calm.

Scrutinizing the enemy's movement, he ordered them to pull back. The tank units were scattered in a few directions.

"Don't be frightened! At this distance they won't hit! Pull them in and fire!"

"Lt. Commander!" Yang persistently said.

"Later!"

There was a terrible heat on the back of their necks. The enemies from the north side were attacking. If they narrowed their eyes a line of tanks, modern improved M60s, could be discerned from their shapes. There were more than a dozen units. If they did their best they might be able to half that number, but then that would be the end. In any case the encampment would be trampled by those caterpillars.

No-

In the direction of the hanging smoke and haze, one of the enemy tanks was intermittently giving off gun smoke from the scorching heat, noticeably making a large flame.

It exploded.

Not only one. There was another, and then another. One by one the enemy on the horizon was being destroyed by someone. Sniper Cannon, and then Super High Speed Missiles. Both had accurate and efficient shooting. It couldn't be seen from Estis' encampment, it was from somewhere far away-

"I came here to tell you about this" Yang said from behind Estis, whose eyes were round.

“Reinforcements will arrive in fifteen minutes, until then hold off. But it seems that they came here earlier than expected-”

“Then why didn’t you say so earlier, idiot!”

“I tried to tell you but you wouldn’t listen!”

“I don’t remember. It’s your bad!”

“That....”

“Well!? What is the military force of the reinforcement? Where are they!?”

“In the mean time, just one unit!”

There was a woman’s voice on top of their heads. Just over the thick hanging smoke, they immediately knew that the voice came from the electronic camouflage that erased the shape of the AS. In only that space there was a distorted silhouette of a giant humanoid.

It was an M9 Gernsbeck. The latest 3rd generation AS that Mithril utilized.

“An M9? When did it get here?”

“Just now, Lt. Commander. It’s good that we made it in time.”

“I remember that voice. Mao. Melissa Mao right!?”

“Correct.”

The form of the M9 could be seen with its ECS canceled, and both arms were shooting Super High Speed Missile K1 Javelins. A missile rushed towards the enemy tanks over the horizon at mach 4 - 5 speed with a powerful Rocket Mortar, and the turret portion blew off sky high.

“This is Melissa Mao of the West Pacific Fleet *Tuatha de Danaan*. Before we proceed to the support of you gentlemen, there is something that I wish to confirm. Is there beer on this base?”

“There is, Lots of it!”

“Then there’s plenty to cool off. Battle Start!”



After saying that, Mao's M9 leapt over the tanks, entering battle maneuvers. Her voice made the encouraged soldiers cheer.

"Yang. The support is only an AS?"

“Yes. There is also a transport helicopter; we’re not expecting heavy firepower.”

Estis smacked his lips without anybody hearing.

They were thankful for the reinforcements, but it would be difficult with only a single AS because they were in a desert- the most difficult terrain for weapons like an AS.



The battle was getting up to speed. The amount of communication with the allies increased with the recognition of “him”.

“This is Uruz 2. Intercepting the attack of the enemy tank units in the southwest. Currently engaging.”

“This is Uruz 6. Four units destroyed. Moving towards Point Hotel.”

“Teiwaz 12 to all units. Newcomers at area 04-23. Main Battle Tank six units, Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV) four units. Closing in on ‘Alamo fortress’ from the north side.”

“Uruz 1, roger. I will confine the enemy units in area 04-23. Uruz 2 what about your ammo?”

“This is Uruz 2. There are only three shots left to the Javelin. It’s about to get intense.”

“Zeta 3 to the gentlemen of the Goddess Family. Proceed with modest firepower from now on. Is there any request for delivery?”

“Uruz 2 to Zeta 3. Take the coordinates now.”

“Confirmed, Uruz 2. What a wonderful voice. If you survive would you like to have dinner with me?”

“Stop it, Zeta 3. She’s a severely unmanageable woman”

“Oh my, Can you think about it?! Two units destroyed. But I can’t move. The enemy bombardment is full, moving into position-”

In spite of the extremely serious situation, the voices of all the operators were quite calm. They were always like that. They didn’t shout during a dangerous time. They also wouldn’t lose their mind or get surprised.

Just like himself- that’s right, like a machine.

The Artificial Intelligence installed on the ARX-8 Laevatein, AI, continued to listen carefully.

The amount of electronic information was much more than the conversation, with each electronic machine making exchanges. Enemy/ ally position, movement speed, movement direction, various conditions, detailed coordinates. Different information from Radar, Infra red rays, Optic Sensor.

That day’s battlefield was two dimensional. Wherever they continued was desert. Aside from that, there was terrain with a number of hills and rocky areas.

The Laevatein continued to be on standby.

It was crouching in the storage area of a transparent Pave Mare transport helicopter that was electronically camouflaged. It was sorting out the information from the allies in the battle field, keeping silent.

The special Man-Machine Interface, TAROS, installed in the unit transported the mental status of the pilot to AI.

He was obviously irritated.

Even though his allies were being compelled to have a difficult fight, he himself was safely hidden in a high place. He was unsatisfied only observing the war situation.

The chance of psychological stress causing the pilot to make a careless mistake or go against orders was close to zero. But

in order to reliably operate the Lambda Driver when the time came, he had to be relaxed. AI decided that was a plus in the battle strategy.

<Sergeant,>

“What?” the pilot inside the cockpit, Sagara Sousuke, answered.

As expected the stress in his voice was high.

<Shall I play some music for you?>

“Don’t.”

<Yes.>

In general it was the expected reply. The chances that that pilot would reply with, “That’s right. Please play a number of melodies” was below 0.1 percent. The proposal was simply a test related to the communication facility.

<You are in a state of not being calm. Is there any way that I can be of use?>

“Then be quiet. That would help the most.”

<Good joke.>

“It’s not a joke. Shut up.”

In the latest “Shut up” of Sousuke, AI interpreted the meaning similar to a sound indicating comprehension.

<Are you worried about your friends? Being in a battle with high risk, you have to bear it being in here.>

In the flat desert, it was a battle of tank units. That would be one of the most difficult situations for the weapon called Arm Slave.

No matter how much High Technology crystal an AS had, it could never attain the armor and fire power of a tank. Not being able to repel tank shells, the standard level assault rifle could also not destroy the tank upfront.

[Frontage Projection Area] - It was said that the area in front was what could be seen the most.

Compared to the tank that crawled on the ground, a vertical walking AS that wiggles could be easily discovered, and easily shot. The greatest strength of an AS was its maneuverability, taking advantage of a complicated terrain to get close. It would be difficult in a desert.

In an exchange of gunfire with a tank, it had no chance of winning.

That was why the ally AS units made use of the dug trenches surrounding the ally base, codename “Alamo Fortress”, to accept the challenge and move from one place to another. Using freely the necessary number of anti tank missile, they moved from one trench to another using smoke screens, radar jamming, and infra red jamming. Though a simple tactic, there was no other way to do it.

<We are the trump card,> Al said. <Without showing ourselves at the start of battle, making this the “potential threat” for the enemy, compelling the enemy to restrict their tactics.>

As for the Laevatein’s fierce offensive power, Amalgam had already understood it during the battle in Mexico. With just one unit it was an existing AS that managed to defeat three Codarl types and three Behemoth types. For the enemy, that was no longer a laughing matter. They had to make a lookout. If discovered they would make all efforts to destroy it, otherwise they would withdraw at full speed.

In other words, they couldn’t fight fairly.

In that situation, the most effective way to utilize the Laevatein was to become an existence for the enemy of “not knowing where he will be coming from”. Hiding inside an ECS installed helicopter, the enemy would not be able to freely allot

their war potential. In order to cope with the appearance of the Laevatein, they were compelled to secure unnecessary lookout and reserved forces.

“I know. If ever the Lt. Commander is on the opposing side, we do not simply use force to push them.”

From the context and nuances of the pronunciation of the word, Al raised the analogy of which person that “Lt. Commander” was. The name of the first candidate was brought up.

<Is Andrei Kalinin leading the enemy?>

“I don’t know. What do you think?”

<In an objective analysis it would be a NO. If it were him, he would choose a more discrete invasion route.>

“What about that ‘intuition’ that you’re so proud of?”

<That would also be a NO.>

At that time there was information coming from Teiwaz 12 that a new enemy had appeared.

Fifteen tanks, fourteen Infantry Fighting Vehicles, and two combat helicopters. There were no ASes. It would be the largest scale of military force so far. To the southwest of “Alamo Fortress” they began their charge in the rocky area approximately ten kilometers away.

“They’re here” Sousuke mumbled.

Those were reserved forces the enemy retained, there was no mistake. In their allies’ tenacious resistance, the enemy commander finally felt like throwing out those military forces. Checking the various resulted data, Al concluded that that appearance would be the last for the enemy.

In an instant the data link discussed with the other units.

Uruz 2’s AI, Friday, and Uruz 1’s AI, Dragonfly, supported Al’s conclusion. Uruz 6’s AI, Yukari, conditionally supported it.

Simplifying the discussion materials and informing all units, Melissa Mao spoke first.

“This is Uruz 2. I don’t have enough power to deal with the enemy in the southwest. Requesting ‘Stopper’ to take the plate.”

“Uruz 1, roger. You heard it, Uruz 7? It’s your turn. Immediately to 07-18—”

“Ah-, wait!” with that Uruz 6, Kurz Weber, interrupted.

“What’s the matter Uruz 6?”

“Before that, can you confirm the hill in 09-18? It smells fishy, but...”

“How fishy? Explain.”

“No...I can’t explain it well. It’s good if it’s nothing. Just be careful of sniping.”

Kurz Weber’s strange warning was only that.

“This is Uruz 7, exterminating enemies in the southwest.”

Sousuke replied, instructing the pilot of the transport helicopter housing the Laevatein to head to the prescribed coordinates.

The sound of the turbo shaft engine was noticeably high. The transparent form of the helicopter flew to the front of the enemy reinforcements, opening the cargo bay hatch.

Velocity, 163 knots. Altitude, 392 feet. They looked down at the desert ground. The breeze of the optic sensor seen in the ECS field of the helicopter was like a purple monotone world.

They neared the landing point. The helicopter flew over the sand dunes like it was crawling.

Countdown. 5 seconds, 4 seconds, 3 seconds, 2 seconds-
There was a dull impact.

The fuselage, accepting the signal from AI, released the fixed hydraulic bolt. The Laevatein detached from the helicopter, releasing the locks from all joints.

There were two or three seconds of freefall.

There was a terrible shock of light rolling and a corresponding reading from the artificial semicircular canals. There was a sudden decrease in ground speed from 140 knots. Estimating velocity vector. Altitude control. Legs facing down with the shock absorption system and the artificial cartilage unit in the extended position, the fuselage extended to 928mm long. The ground surface's solidity and friction factor was being analyzed within the databank of the terrain library. They headed towards the optimum landing altitude.

They landed.

The shock absorber of the entire joints damper instantly evaporated, stopping the 30G impact. The Motion Manager set the joint control to semi active. The muscle package organically expanded and revolved. The ARX-8 Laevatein's leg sunk in the sand and trampled the ground. The unit's whole height danced in the rising cloud of dust.

It was a violent landing, but the pilot immediately went to combat maneuvers.

Nimble moving, he hid the lower half of the body in the undulation of the desert, confronting the enemy to his 10 o'clock. Sensing the sand cloud of the landing, the enemy forces reacted immediately, throwing a rain of high explosive projectiles to the surrounding area of the landing point.

Weapon selection. A large artillery from the hard point loaded in the unit. 65mm Demolition Gun at the ready, the support arms connects the long gun barrel. The Howzer Mode was equipment that rapidly increased the range and accuracy of the demolition gun, with the aid of the Lambda Driver it was equipment that was possible to shoot from the front, like a tank.

However, that large cannon itself was a low tech designed weapon. Like the Snipe Cannon which was the latest weapon of

the AS, it was not loaded with an independent ballistic calculation computer, even the alignment system, aside from the simple optic sensor, was also not loaded.

The signs of the enemy flickered in the white heat of the desert.

“Let’s start.”

<Roger, Sarge.>

Aim- Fire.

At the same time the Lambda Driver operated, stopping the recoil from the shot. Even then, the legs sunk into the sand and the frame of the whole body emanated a bizarre sound.

The shell of the large muzzle missed the targeted tank, and just behind, to the right, it hit the ground and exploded.

They knew that the first volley would miss. They acquired data from the helicopter in the sky. Wind, 1.5mm to the left, elevation up 1.2mm correction. They recalculated the shell’s drift and anticipated parabola.

While reloading the next shot the enemy tanks returned fire.

Two shots. The projectiles hit seven meters in the 4 o’clock direction and six meters in the 9 o’clock direction of the Laevatein. The shockwave hit the white armor. The unit staggered and shook in a random rhythm.

<It is dangerous. Shall we change the firing position?>

“No, we’ll slug it through.”

<Roger.>

Al was plainly not resisting.

Compared to the time he was operating the ARX-7, there was no hesitation in Sousuke’s judgment. No, the former him had no hesitation, just then he was being accompanied by a “Strong Will”.

In an ordinary AI such an abstract concept would not be detected, but AI was different. Having a direct reading of the pilot's mental state, he had the function to agree with the unit system. Of course AI was not human. It was not that his duty as a calculating unit with an objective to support combat was forgotten- but he was also a machine that was starting to deeply understand complex human emotions at the same time.

He also had the provision in the element of self identity.

The other day, on a whim of Kurz Weber and the maintenance crew, they proposed that the synthetic voice of AI be changed into a female voice. Saying that "There would be an attractiveness to it", AI felt a strong resistance to that proposal. Even though there was no logical reason, he felt that it should not be done. In the end, the modification made Sousuke say "Disgusting", and he rejected it. AI and him were completely of the same opinion. In short, his own voice was not only a synthetic voice of the personal interface, but something else that could feel "disgusting". In addition, a Tactical Support AI "Veteran like me" who had a long military service that had gone through numerous difficult battles using a weak female voice... Would it not draw enormous disdain?

There was gun smoke four kilometers beyond.

The enemy alignment had been corrected. 120mm shells were aimed at the Laevatein. At the same time that AI gave out a warning, a strong reaction from TAROS could be seen. Reflecting the pilot, the controlled defense impulse ran past the unit, warping the space in front. Like it was "Obvious".

As far as could be confirmed, two shots of the enemy forces stopped in mid air and were crushed by an invisible force.

<Success. The Operation of the Lambda Driver->

"I know."

Sagara Sousuke pulled the trigger. That time it was a hit. The enemy tank in the middle of the ranks was blown away like a paper toy, spinning around and dancing in the air.

Reload. Fire. Second tank destroyed.

A few position modifications. The demolition gun fired again.

There was violent gunfire. Three tanks, four tanks, and then five tanks. One by one the enemy tanks were being destroyed. It was a battle that was not possible for an ordinary AS. It was already conjectured that that was no ordinary unit. The remaining enemy forces repeated a feint fire and started to retreat, their shapes hidden in the mountain ridge of the short sand dunes.

“This is Gebo 5. The enemy in the southwest has withdrawn.”

“Uruz 2 roger. You heard it, plant one in!”

Since the prepared military force had received significant damage, the enemy had given up its attack on “Alamo Fortress”.

Not only the opponent facing Laevatein, but also the enemy forces in combat in other fields. AI analyzed the tactical map, examining the unit’s condition, and timely adjusted the output of the condenser and cooling unit.

They crossed the ridge. The battle ended with the allies winning.

Data acquired from their own sensor, data coming from the ally units ADM (Advance Data Modem), all the data indicated the decline in potential threats.

At that time, there was an abnormality sensed in the rocky area four kilometers away.

Sousuke, reacting faster than AI, suddenly made the unit do a complete somersault.

“.....!”

That rocky area- from an unexpected direction there was a shell attack at 1000 meter per second. The Laevatein managed to evade a dangerous place. Breaking through the gravitational field of the Lambda Driver, the shell grazed the left shoulder armor, hitting the ground around 40 meters behind and raising a big sand cloud. If he had reacted slower by 0.5 seconds, the Laevatein's body might have been cut in half by the enemy bullet.

It was a snipe from a Lambda Driver equipped unit.

<Distance 40, 10 o'clock direction. Due to a Lambda Driver equipped unit->

“Return fire.”

The form of the enemy unit couldn't be seen, but Sousuke didn't care and fired. Maneuvering randomly, he continued to fire the demolition gun. The ally unit's AI received the information from AI via the data link and turned towards the rocky area simultaneously with their anti ECS sensors, calculating the exact position at super high speed.

Receiving the data of the enemy position, the Laevatein fired again.

That shot would have hit at a very near distance. The ally units equipped with Lambda Driver detecting equipment, “fairy eyes”, confirmed the strong interference of a gravitational field. It did not receive any damage. If it were an ordinary unit then it would have been a fatal attack.

The enemy's judgment was fast.

Any further attack was given up; with ECS in full operation it retreated at high speed. It was no use to make pursuit. It was too far for the Laevatein to pursue, and any other ordinary AS or helicopter getting near would be dangerous. The pilots of the other allied units also concluding the same, they concentrated in the lookout for the new enemy.

“He came out after all” Kurz Weber mumbled on the wireless radio. “I told you, didn’t I? It stunk.”

“Yeah” Sagara Sousuke answered. “Because of you I managed to avoid it.”

Sagara Sousuke’s reaction exceeding that of Al’s was because of the vague warning from Kurz Weber. In the corner of his usual consciousness, he was looking out at the indicated direction of [09-18]. Then the enemy sniper was in fact there.

Kurz Weber was a pilot who always threw out jokes. He was also known to talk haphazardly. Uttering such nonsense as important tactical advice and accurately identifying “intuition” and “instinct” was a risky attempt which a Bayes Statistics-dependent Al could not do.

At most, such imitation could not be done by humans themselves.

“The problem is, why didn’t that enemy shoot until the last moment?” Belfegan Clouseau asked. “If he had that intention, he would be gunning for us one by one from the start, blowing at least one of us off....”

The position of the LD (Lambda Driver) equipped AS that appeared last was setting the range from the second half of the battle. That enemy unit even when the tank forces were being destroyed had kept quiet and concealed himself.

“It’s simple. Because of the Laevatein.” Melissa Mao said.

Even if it managed to destroy a number of M9s at first, if his location was revealed, he would get caught in the attack of the Laevatein which was hiding from somewhere. That was why, until the Laevatein showed itself, he was hiding in that rocky area with ECS. And waiting for the appearance of the Laevatein. Originally it was planned to finish it in the first shot, but Sagara Sousuke had managed to evade that shot. On top of losing the surprise attack,

there was no more chance to destroy the Laevatein. That was why he had retreated.

In short, it was a success in preserving the Laevatein from a dangerous place.

<All the enemy forces have retreated.> AI informed, analyzing the data from all the units.

“Alright. Master Mode 6. Have a look out with the Anti ECS Sensor (ECCS).”

<Again, there is no such equipment.>

“...that’s right. I forgot that this unit is a piece of junk.”

In return for the Laevatein’s output and maneuverability, and also in order to design the strong reinforcement of its offensive power, the regular equipment of the M9 series ASes that it should already have, like electronic equipments, were totally omitted. Sagara Sousuke was sarcastic about that.

<You are also a piece of junk. They say that because of the prognostic symptoms of your injury you’re diet has been limited.>

“Only on Alcohol and salty foods. There is no trouble for others.”

<Is that so? There is a saying that “A man who does not drink alcohol, has already lost half of his life”.>

“I’m withdrawing that life. You’re getting really annoying.”

<It is because you are slandering me.>

“Shut up.”

<Negative. After this, let me tell you 38 items of reason why this unit is not a junk. First, number 1. This unit is equipped with the newest test type generator PRX->

“I know, so just shut up!”



The forces of Mithril waited for a few hours and withdrew from the desert base. All the goods and arms were crammed into the transport ship with ECS, with their appearance disappearing faraway- to the west or to the south. What remained were the empty containers and used materials, and large quantities of empty beer bottles.

That AS', the Eligor's, night vision sensor viewed the tracks of the base's scenery, Wilhelm Casper slightly smacked his lips.

The small squad of infantry investigated the ruins of the barracks and armored cars, without getting any impressive results. No, on the contrary-

There was an explosion.

One of the soldiers carelessly touched the attaché case lying on the ground, got caught in the booby trap, and was blown away. The surprised surrounding soldiers were lying on the floor for no apparent reason looking out in the surrounding.

"Don't get excited, don't get excited. It's just a parting gift." Casper told the soldiers with a voice of being fed up.

Most of the soldiers of Amalgam were sourced locally. Quality couldn't be guaranteed. Being involved in such rudimentary disagreements couldn't be avoided.

The enemy was already thousands of kilometers away.

The sweeping squad's commander, a bribed commissioned officer of the local military, was shouting "this isn't what you said". Although a suitable amount of money was already received, the unexpected counterattack of the people in Mithril resulted in great damage. In top of that, in the husk of the base that they finally occupied, everything was of no value. It was not unreasonable for them to complain.

However for Casper, those negotiations were already confirmed beforehand.

He moved his unit a few hundred meters from the sand dune, opening the cockpit hatch, and skillfully got out of the unit. On the complex surface configuration of the shoulder, he stood on top of the red armor and looked around the area with the naked eye just immediately after sunset. The scorching heat of noon still remained, with the lukewarm breeze rustling. The western sky was still a vague violet color.

Taking off his headgear he narrowed his eyes.

He had an angular face shape, like an Aryan, and his eyes were transparent like a blue owl. Could it be because the majority of his life was spent in the open fields? His short blond hair was darkened here and there, and his age would not be known at a glance. He may be in his 30's, or in his 50's. His lightly warped mouth had a certain charm, like eating a person. His eyes penetrated the darkness with an extremely cruel characteristic of a hunter lodged inside.

Wilhelm Casper surveyed the surroundings with his sniper eyes.

Getting down to the ground from the kneeling unit, he carefully investigated the remnants of the enemy M9 in the sand- the foot prints and the evidence of the shooting altitude, surmising how it moved.

“Oh well-” Casper mumbled, remembering the face of the sniper boarding that M9.

In every shot, there should be no major movement. Efficient and quick rapid fire should be stressed, taking pains to “take down as many enemies”. Looking lightly at his own safety was dependent on the distance between the enemy and himself. In other words, overestimating one's own shooting sense.

“Not yet. That boy...”

However, informing that white Lambda Driver-equipped AS of his own position was also “him”. He praised this point about him. Because of that, the certain kill shot was evaded. Even for a bullet traveling 4300 kilometers per hour, it would take three seconds to reach a distance of four kilometers. With vigilance, evasion would not be difficult.

There was an incoming call from the satellite circuit. He replied with the headgear in his ear.

“There are results right, Mister Tin?”

The other party was a manager of Amalgam, Mister Kalium, Andrei Kalinin; the Russian managing the will of Leonard Testarossa, who was recuperating.

“No. I tried to finish it in the first shot, but he skillfully evaded it. Isn’t that a big deal, that pupil of yours?”

“I wonder. Wasn’t it because of your pupil?”

“Of course, that as well.” Casper laughed.

“Weber was a fine sniper.”

“Past tense huh? He’s still alive.”

“Eventually it will become past tense.” Kalinin said with a voice without any particular importance.

There was movement in the abandoned base.

After taking heavy damage, the soldiers who were not able to profit from the satisfactory results were pissed with unsatisfied voices. The commissioned officers were whispering, pointing at the Eligor. For at least some earnings, they were aiming for that unit.

“Ah. Just a moment” Casper informed, climbing into the back of the unit.

Opening the weapons rack behind the cockpit hatch, he took out a 308 caliber rifle covered in a bulky cotton cloth. It had a

blackened wooden frame in various places from the term of service. Loaded into this super hi-tech unit was a retro smelly oiled bolt action hunter's gun. He didn't make any prudent adjustments to the scope. The distance was 200 meters.



He slid a cartridge into the chamber, driving the bolt, smoothly twisting the lock.

Aim. Fire.

200 meters beyond, the man who Casper shot, suddenly squatted, both hands holding his crotch, and made an unsightly voice. The surrounding subordinates were flustered, nervous and shaking their heads.

“Quit it, next time I’ll blow off your other testicle!”

Casper informed them using the exterior speaker of the Eligor.

Those attending to the commander, those who were standing doing nothing, and those hiding in confusion, there were none of them who would fire back.

“Are there any problems?”

“No, just reining in some idiots.” Casper replied, re-wrapping carefully the gun with smoke rising. “Anyway there were no results. I’m going back.”

Casper crawled back into the cockpit, running towards the extraction point with the transport helicopter.

The priority target, Laevatein, was a failure. The power to go against the stubborn Amalgam- they had overlooked the small company. There was no longer any reason to be there. They should proceed with the “Project”; someday Mithril would no longer matter. Certainly on the enemy’s side, also for the former student-

No. They will be confronting each other sooner or later.

Tasting the excitement of hunting each other down, he was welcoming a wonderful death.



It was a much stricter house arrest.

After the kidnapping of Chidori Kaname from Nickelo, she was moved to various places.

First she stayed for two weeks at a farm in Texas, and then she was taken to Switzerland and detained for a week in an old mountain villa. Both were crude environments compared to the high class villa in Nickelo. Food was also not satisfactory. Only canned goods and military rations.

After only a few days she was moved again.

Belgium, Denmark, North Italy.

Then to Libya via Turkey and staying there for one week in a cheap hotel.

It was mostly car and helicopter transfers, but the travel took a long time. The beds and food were awful, as usual, and she was being exhausted day by day.

After a month and a half of passing through Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, they returned to North America.

They stayed for one week in a super high class hotel in Las Vegas, but she couldn't take one step out of her room. Even then, with an environment of only a bed and food, and the ability to simply take a shower, Kaname was grateful from the bottom of her heart.

However, next time they suddenly flew to Sri Lanka.

Kaname's physical condition was finally crumbled, and she fainted. From an air-conditioned neo-gothic hotel, she was moved to a terrorist training camp in the tropics with nothing but an electric fan. Losing her spirit, she was thrown into a rigorous place.

The heat would not go down. In the camp that was prepared in that jungle she mostly stayed in a pipe bed in the smallest room.

It had been the worst place so far. The heat was natural but the humidity was the worst. There was a bad odor coming from somewhere in the camp, creeping in to the shut room that Kaname

was staying in. The mushy smell of live garbage or cheap wine or the fermentation of vomit, with the gun smoke and smell of oil stimulant mixed in her nose.

She could hear gunfire and explosions by day and night, the arrival and departure of helicopters and the sound of an AS' engine echoing, and the wild jeers of the men. She had no moment of peace.

And then the bugs.

From the bed, from the window, and bugs that she did not know the name of, penetrated, creeping about the bed and wall, flying around the light bulb. Furthermore they were big. A leaf bug that was three times bigger in size than that of Japan's was flying about her head with a noise that sent chill down her spine. Before she knew it, a half meter centipede was crawling up her clothes.

She wanted to scream out, but Kaname did not have that impulse.

Because she did not want to lose. She wouldn't show her own weakness, they would certainly be glad. She definitely wouldn't allow them to think that she was a little princess that screamed at the sight of a bug.

They're trying to make me weak-

Not knowing the details, they were now ill-treating her. That was why they pressured her. Crude bed, bad food, unsanitary room, a sufficient trial to a girl who was used to civilization. Moving her from one coarse environment to another, making her stomach churn in total exhaustion. No matter how much she stretched her willpower, if the physical strength of a human dropped they would unconsciously obey. It was an operation to weaken her vitality at the hotel at Las Vegas.

It seemed that Leonard was still alive.

However, since then he had not shown himself.

She did not know if their treatment to her had been ordered by Leonard. That Polish girl, Sabina Refunio, was always following Kaname. She would not tell her anything about Leonard's circumstance except him being "alive".

On the other hand, she had met Kalinin a number of times. Once at the farm in Texas, once while flying to Belgium in a small airport, and then once in the hotel in Las Vegas. Every one of them was not a significant meeting. More than coming to see Kaname, he had the attitude of confirming the state of a prisoner. Just getting close observing her face, confirming her limbs and neck were not getting too skinny, confirming if there were traces of bruises or burns. Kaname also did not ask Kalinin anything, she did not hurl any abusive words. It was already meaningless to say anything to him.

At the height of her fainting and fever she saw a lot of nightmares.

On a morning, she was passing the school like she always did. Then a silver AS destroyed the school building. On the courtyard countless bodies of her classmates were lying on top of one another. Burning. Even if she tried to turn away her eyes she couldn't. A large number of tears flowed with the corpse of a blackened Tokiwa Kyouko in her eyes.

On another morning, she woke up in a mansion. Unknown men were standing in her bedroom, looking down at Kaname with a grin. She wanted to jump to her feet and run, but she couldn't run. She was held down and they forcibly stripped her clothes. The men's arms become like a centipede. "Help, Sousuke!" screaming that, he wouldn't come. "He's already dead", the centipedes laughed, creeping about her whole body.

On another morning she was in school. There were many apathetic eyes and malicious faint smiles. The text books were

gone again. Countless jeers were echoing from her open notebook. Die. Stink. Annoying. Getting sick, she rushed to the toilet. On top of the private room filthy water was running. The girl leader was laughing. That girl was walking with Sousuke in her hands. *Unforgivable. That's mine.* She wailed, and went in a fit of rage. *You would be better off dead. All of you, everyone should die.*

And countless other gloomy mornings, she was being attacked.

“Uh....”

The strong light burned her eyelids, Kaname let out a small groan.

The sunlight from the crack in the window shined through, hanging on her cheeks on top of the bed. The sheets, clothes, and her hair were damp with wetness, sticking closely to her skin.

What time was it? Probably noon, or before that.

But how many days had passed since she had passed out in that camp was not clear to her. Her fever seemed to have lowered.

Trying to get up from the bed, her balance crumbled and she fell down. Grabbing the desk nearby, an empty cup fell down from the bed. The sound must have been heard. There was a sound of a key opening the door, Sabina Refunio entered the room.

It was not the usual suit. She was wearing a plain black t-shirt and olive pants. She did not sweat, even in that humid environment.

“It seems that you’re awake” Sabina said. “You seem to be having nightmares.”

“Water... can I have some...”

“Later for that. Let me check your temperature.”

“My throat is thirsty.”

Ignoring Kaname’s words, Sabina took out a digital thermometer from the bag on top of the desk. She put it inside

Kaname's ear and the measurement ended immediately. It made a small clever *pi* sound. An out of place sound in that primitive mountain hut.

"Hey. Water..."

"It's down, huh?"

Sabina took a look at the liquid crystal panel of the thermometer. It read [37.30].

"...it's a bit sudden but, Sabina. It seems that you hate me, right?"

"What kind of answer will satisfy you?"

Saying it expressionlessly, she poured water into a dirty cup, and handed it to her.

"Enough, I fully understand."

She drank the cup of muddied water. It was not cold or warm. She couldn't feel anything.

"Did Leonard order this?"

"About what?"

"Being shut in these terrible places, exhausting me."

"There are many people who want you."

Not answering the question, Sabina answered her unconcerned.

"In order to guarantee your safety, there is no need for you to stay in a comfortable place. Beside, this camp is much safer than the hotel in Vegas."

"Is that so?"

"That is the only reason. There is nothing that can be done but to grow accustomed to this."

"But Leonard is heartless. If he is recovered he should at least visit once."

"Do you want to see him?"

“No. What you said has a meaning of ‘it would be nice to visit you’”

Sabina’s breath stopped for an instant.

“Don’t you love him?”

“I don’t understand its meaning.”

“Ordinarily it would be irritating. Taking care of the girl who shot the one you love, and it was an order from the one you love himself. Moreover that person would not even come to visit. You also want to be the one harassed, right?”

“You seem to misunderstand something.”

The tone of her voice was persistently calm.

“Lord Leonard has only recently recovered. Until then we have not received any instructions. The orders have not changed, I am only taking care of you the same way I did before.”

“I see. A faithful dog all throughout.”

Kaname spoke with a challenge. How to offend Sabina, was what her absentminded head desperately thinking.

“Leonard. That guy is a pathetic man. Even having an exhausted girlfriend here, still humoring me on the brink of death. In the end with his form, banged his head! And got done. He’s past stupidity, only pathetic. Really.”

Although realizing that she said such vulgar words, guilt would be of no use in that setting. If she spoke detestable words with all her strength, would it not be a provocation?

“Ah, I understand. That’s why he won’t show his face right? No matter what kind of excuse you make up for him. I’m sure he’s embarrassed about being too ugly--”

Suddenly, the glass cup Sabina was holding broke. Broken with only the force of her grip.

Taking the shard of glass, she grabbed Kaname's neck with the other hand and with tremendous force threw the back of her head to the bed.

"I will not forgive you badmouthing him." Sabina said.

An angry voice squeezed out from her throat. Blood dripped from her right hand that gripped the glass fragment, dripping in Kaname's face.

"Especially you. Chidori Kaname. It was because you were selected by him, I refused to kill you. Even though that pride merits certain death. On top of that, scorning him. You're sneering. Unforgivable. No matter what he thinks, I will not forgive you."

Not even a voice of protest came out. Sabina's physique was no different from hers, but it was like a wrestler weighing 100 kilograms riding her like a horse.

"I lived in a street of Lodz full of garbage. My first kill was a police officer whose name I don't know that had an interest in SM, next was my mother who sold me to him. On the next day, my job became killing. Taken in by the Mafia in Warsaw, I killed many. I did not expect to be treated like a human by anyone. He picked me up like that and wrapped me up. If it's him then everything can be written off. I believed everything of this in him. It's fine even if he didn't love me back. It's fine as long as I'm of use to him. That is what I thought."

"....."

"Until this time, I don't know how many guards you were rude to. Smashing the bridge of your nose that is ignorant to the ways of the world... that degree would be enough. But I can't do it. And for everything, that he did not wish for. And for you to have 'bad feelings' towards his attitude... That I cannot forgive. Absolutely unforgivable."

Sabina brandished the glass. Her pale face dyed in joy, those eyes stared at Kaname's throat. A killer's eye. A person who practiced her own work, eyes that dealt with her opponent skillfully. Those were not the eyes of a human.

"That's why, it's enough. I will kill you."

"Sto--"

"It's your fault."

She thrust the glass piece into her throat. Hard. Sharp. A cold object deeply penetrating, opening a hole in the respiratory tract. In place of screaming a whistling sound and breathing came out. Warm liquid in her mouth was overflowing.

Sabina gouged the wound, extracting, and stabbed again.

It seems that she was not satisfied with the throat alone. She tore up Kaname's face. Tearing up the warped cheeks a number of times, slicing off the nose, tearing up the lips, smashing the eyes- the signs of the flesh of Chidori Kaname, all of it was erased. Without anything to do with will, the limbs convulsed, the fingers cramped, tearing at the sheets stained with blood.

Kaname turned into a gushing and bubbling lump of meat as Sabina sneered.

Her lovely voice going mad, she mingled together with the centipedes and student's laughs. Sabina, horseback riding, became another girl. Raising a facial expression of being in ecstasy because of the spurting blood, it was a girl with black hair. That was herself.

"Let's change places" that Chidori Kaname whispered, putting her face near the Chidori Kaname that was a lump of meat. "Don't you think it's about time to let me do as I wish?"

A scream finally came out, Kaname jumped out of the bed.

It was the camp in Sri Lanka. A corner of a crude room with sunlight shining from the window.

Her breathing was wild. Her head was heavy. She was damp with sweat, even her underwear was wet.

The only door in the room opened, Sabina Refunio entered. Black tank top and olive pants. Not even sweating in that heat.

“It seems that you’re awake. You seem to be having nightmares.”

“Water... can I have some...”

“Later for that. Let me check your temperature.”

“My throat is thirsty.”

Sabina took out the digital thermometer, inserting it in Kaname’s ear. There was the electronic sound that she remembered.

“Hey. Water...”

“It’s down, huh?”

The thermometers liquid crustal panel read [37.30]. Exactly like the dream. A chill ran down her spine.

“Sabina?”

“Yes?”

“Do you know a place called Lodz?”

Sabina poured water in the dirty cup. Her hands stopped for a second.

“A long time ago it was a place where I lived...”

“Is that so?”

“Where did you....”

“I don’t know”

Forcibly taking the cup, she drank the water.



Together with the roar of the C-130 transport planes Turbo Prop, they landed on Rekun Island.

In the continuous kilometer of flat sandy beaches, there was an iron plate paved as a runway. The distance of the runway was not enough, and they would need to borrow the power of a disposable rocket booster during takeoff.

Sousuke, who had been working since the arrival at early dawn, had taken a long over-due break in the early afternoon.

Rekun Island was a lonely island in the corner of the Caribbean Sea.

It was the accumulation point of the goods necessary for the Atlantic Ocean activity of the Assault Landing Submarine *Tuatha de Danaan*. It had been assigned as a temporary base, so to speak. Of course there was no dock that could stow the giant submarine; the *de Danaan* was on standby two kilometers away from the beach, fully opening the flight deck to receive large quantities of supplies from the transport helicopter.

It had been a year since Sousuke fished at a coast.

The previous fishing trip was a short time at Merida Island with Chidori Kaname. Merely 30 minutes- even then, it was a wonderful 30 minutes. Not having her there... Sousuke tried not to think of it as much as possible. He would only exhaust himself in moping.

A reel attached to a big rod was thrust into the ground, since there were no fish around, he slowly read Jun yearbook under the blue sky.

The fishing rod was borrowed from the supply unit's Private Falkowski. Anyway, in less than an hour they had to start the support of escaping the island. Even then, to be able to enjoy that luxury, with the roaring sound of the transport in the rear passing the temporary runway, it was insignificant.

“Well, it’s not like the beach in Guam” Melissa said on the far side of Sousuke. “In the end we could only sunbath, isn’t it such a progress?”

She was on top of the paved beach cost, just lying around in a bathing suit. Beside her was Technical Officer Nora Lemming, and then on the opposite side was Tessa’s secretary, Jacqueline Viran, and Communications Officer Sachi Shinohara. They all had the same appearance of bleaching their young and vivacious bodies in the sunlight. Every one of them was in a blue and grey camouflage bikini. The four of them did not stir. With their bare skin shining from the ample sun block they had applied, beads of sweat flowed from their smooth curves.

They escaped Merida Island with mostly just what they were wearing. There was no opportunity for them to obtain swimwear. Using the free time inside the ship, it seemed like they were made from the remaining urban camouflage.

Thinking that the “time to wear” them might come, they managed to put it together during their day to day life previously unseen.

Tuatha de Danaan fleet’s female officers’, especially young female officers’, numbers were limited. It seemed that those girls had a mysterious solidarity without regards to rank. It was strengthened especially during the escape from Merida. Most probably from the death in action of female pilot Eva Santos.

“That’s right. It’s been a long time.” said Lemming, with the bikini clinging to her abundant bust.

“Hey, isn’t it good that we made this?” Viran said, putting the straw of her sports drink to her red lips.

“A...a more docile design would be nicer, right? Ahaha....” Shinohara said with an unsteady insincere smile.

Shinohara was Japanese, similar to Sousuke. Usually she was a girl who wore plain make-up with black rimmed glasses, just then she was in a fashion style like that of Mao's. It was said that she spent a number of years in the Air Force after getting out of college before entering Mithril. Although already in her late twenties, from what could be seen, it would not be mysterious if she would appear to be a similar age to Sousuke. On top of retaining her childish appearance, she had the lowest rank of Sergeant among them. Moreover, having a conservative character, Shinohara was put in a position of a younger sister to Mao and the others. Particularly when Tessa was not around. In reality, she was probably the most senior among them.

Looking at the appearance of Shinohara, Mao and the others laughed.

“What are you talking about? This is a rare chance.”

“Won't you regret dying without getting a tan?”

“Do fun things at a fun time....fufufu. Look, those guys are looking.”

“Those looks are difficult!”

The soldiers, who were beginning to send off supply goods to the transport, were blowing whistles from far away.

Though you willfully turned into that appearance. Why do you need to sunbath beside me? Sousuke thought secretly, and let out a small sigh.

No, he could roughly guess the reason. There were three spacious sandy beaches to relax on by the coast and all of them were occupied by male colleagues. There were those who sunbathed and enjoyed eating, those who preserved their skill by firing practice, and others.

Sousuke took off from the soldiers, to enjoy fishing alone in the sandy soil (that's right, he recently understood the luxury of

being alone), and then Mao and the others intruded. Glancing anyhow, it was certainly troublesome to have a crowd of men calling out.

What they had said was, “have a good look, you should be thankful.”

And “you already have a girl so don’t mind”.

It was because of the conversation with Chidori Kaname after the battle in Nickelo in Southern Mexico. For the female members in Sousuke’s fleet, he had a more familiar existence than before. Far from that, without minding Sousuke, they talked about concerns of love (apparently).

For example, for a long time----

“Well, how are you doing with Bruzer recently?”

“It’s getting good. He’s nice.”

“Hee. He has an appearance of being violent.”

“He’s not like that! No, not really like that. But well, he’s, a maintenance soldier... fufufu.”

“Ooh!”

“In other words he’s handy with his fingers!? Nora-san!”

“Well I must admit? Though we don’t have considerable time. Hey, about that, having excuses concerning THAT.”

“Aah...is that so?”

“Then what about Weber-kun? They say his sniping fingers are soft. Like a musical instrument.”

“Aah, although he’s a bad guitarist-”

“That’s urban legend.”

“Stop with the dirty jokes since Sousuke is around. Well, what’s that? Are you asking me about Kurz?”

“Yeah. You don’t?”

“Of course not!? Stop that, that idiot...”

“Ah, is that so...”

“Oh my, how unexpected.”

“Wait! Wait, are there rumors spreading!?”

“No, I just thought it was like that.”

“Me too. Don’t you look suitable with a good-looking guy?”

“Eeh-!”

“Kidding kidding, sorry sorry. It’s nothing, as expected.”

“Really stop it-”

“Sorry. Ahahaha”

“The truth, which one is like a brother? Or it’s that after all...”

“Eh, then it’s Lt. Commander?”

“I don’t understand, which Lt. Commander?”

“Stupid. Ben of course. It’s Ben.”

“No, about Ben-. Direct supervisor for the time being. Right now it’s a little....”

“Well, he’s not the handy type.”

“Then you mean that’s not the entirety of it?”

“Is that so?”

“Ah-. But the Lt. Commander is nice. He’s incredibly stoic, like a Samurai.”

“Hohou. Sachi is into something like that?”

“Want me to arrange it for you?”

“Eeh~! I..it’s alright-! But what now...I’m bothered.”

“Be clear about it, that’s why Japanese are...”

“But, but...”

----something like that.

Whoever they were talking about, the circumstance did not matter to Sousuke. It was not like he would talk to anybody about the subject of those conversations. In the first place he didn’t comprehend even ten percent of it. However, that was what Sousuke understood.



四人は宗介の存在を気にもせず、あれこれと
恋愛がらみ(と思しき)話を交わしている――
どうやら俺は、狸の置物か地蔵のようにも思われているらしい。

フルメタル・パニック!
せまるニック・オブ・タイム

The four of them did not mind the existence of Sousuke, talking about their love (or it would seem)-

For him it seemed like he was an ornamental charm of a Raccoon

Somehow, they seemed to think of him like an image of a raccoon ornament looking over.

Before he would not think of anything, but he had this vacantness. Sousuke could vaguely understand.

“By the way where’s Emilia and Yeta?” Mao said, correcting the position of her sunglass.

“Looks like they’re still working and can’t get off. It’s probably useless. What a pity” Lemming said.

In Sousuke’s memory, Emilia was the communications officer announced as an essential member, Yeta was an engineer of the engineering department. Although they wanted to participate in the sunbathing, they were busy with the bringing in of supplies and could not slip away.

“Then it’s impossible for her after all.”

“Who?”

“The Captain.”

“Aah, Tessa” Mao muttered, keeping a little silent.

“....She has so many consultations. As expected she can’t get away.

“Well, that’s right....”

“We did manage to make her share of swimsuit.”

“If its chance, then there would be another one.”

With the talk about Tessa coming out, their cheerful mood was hidden. They must have been worried about her hard work.

“Will she be alright?” Shinohara asked.

“Hn-. She said it herself.”

“Isn’t she getting skinny?” Lemming said.

“That’s right. Also....how do you say it...” Mao hesitated to say, and shrugged her shoulders.

“What?”

“Nothing. It’s alright. That girl is only tired.”

Lemming and the others did not notice, but Sousuke could guess the change in tone in Mao's voice. The way Mao was talking just then was the voice of a commander during battle. During a time she would say in front of her subordinates "don't worry, allied support will be coming shortly", that voice. Mao, who was intimately close to Tessa, must have felt some problems wrapping her up.

After the battle in Mexico there was not even the opportunity even once to have a slow talk with her. In front of Mardukas and a number of commissioned officers, Mao and Kurz, Clouseau and the others, he had roughly told them about the battle in Tokyo and everyday at Namsak, and then he had led up to their reunion.

From their personal relationship, and the way she looked at Sousuke with weakness when face to face, he could easily guess the great responsibility Tessa was carrying. Driving the devastated state of Mithril, and on top of the remaining survivors of the fleet, she planned to re-organize them.

In the past, when Sousuke was assigned to the *Tuatha de Danaan* fleet, it was unspeakable when Tessa had not yet gained the trust of her subordinates. From then two years had passed. Right then, for the organization, she was an existence that could not be lost. Not only in military terms, but also for the mental fulcrum.

She was a genius, and she also had charisma. She was doing splendidly as a leader. The many officers did not look at her as a "special person", and did not imagine so.

However, Teletha Testarossa was not a super human.

At most she was a 17 year-old girl that depended on her wits. And she was trying to shoulder an entire organization that should have been dead. For the people that knew her well, a few

subordinates that had seen her smile and cry, those words were not openly spoken. Why, because that was what she herself wished for.

That was the time when the base's siren sounded.

On a constructed tent in the center of the accumulated goods a few hundred meters away, from the speakers of the temporary headquarters, the piercing sound of an alarm echoed on one side of the beach.

Short two times, long once.

That was the signal for "Urgent, prepare for evacuation".

Although they didn't know the details, a hostile unit was approaching Rekun Island. There must have been some signs sensed by the Pave Mare transport helicopter and Super Barrier patrolling the surrounding air space. Essential members were to stop operation and board the *Tuatha de Danaan*. The ship would make emergency submersion. Aircrafts should take off. And then dispose of, by blowing up and incinerating, any remaining unloaded cargo. It was regrettable to dispose of supplies, but any remaining investigatable supplies would allow the enemy to guess what supplies were available and what supplies were not available to the *de Danaan*.

The soldiers that could be seen far away, those relaxing on the beach and those practice firing all the time, started withdrawal preparations in haste.

"A-ah. That was a short break."

"Merely a 30 minute vacation. I wonder when the next one will be..."

Mao and the others complained. On top of their swimsuits they put on T-shirts. Food and drinks were quickly cleaned up.

Sousuke also put away his fishing tools. He urgently turned the reel, with unknown seaweeds caught in his needle.



“Depth 650. Speed 25 knots. No ships in pursuit in 20 miles circumference” Vice Captain Richard Mardukas informed Tessa.

She turned to the information on the main screen, and reconfirmed what the Vice Captain had reported. No matter how many reports were received from the Deck Officer, they knew that there was no problem with the ship’s condition and let out a sigh.

“Alert level to yellow 3. Cancel Noise Regulation.”

“Aye Ma’am. Alert level to yellow 3. Noise Regulation cancelled.” Mardukas repeated, informing the instructions to the deck officers.

Sensing the approach of the enemy, they left Rekun Island to disappear into the deep sea. It had already been five hours. In the storage deck the essential surface members who were catching their breath were starting about in the sorting of the supplies.

“It was a general assumption of the area was it not?” Mardukas asked.

“That’s right. But it was early.”

Having the base at Rekun Island being discovered at anytime, they already knew from the start that it would be attacked. As for the goods that had remained on the base, well the important ones had already been loaded into the *de Danaan*. At that time, if they were to ignore the crew’s weariness, it was possible for them to cruise without resupplying for four months at most. As long as they could navigate underwater, right then the *de Danaan* was still the world’s strongest ship. Where ever they were, where ever they were going, and where they would be appearing- nobody knew except those who were on the bridge.

Having said that, it was unnatural for the enemy to sense Rekun Island and dispatch military forces so quickly. The figures could not express the enemy's subtle quickness. That was what Tessa felt.

"Is the reason for it due to the enemy's desperation?"

"Yes. Even the time during at Sahara Desert, we just barely made it, right?"

"That is right. Then that means--"

Mardukas did not say anything further; Tessa knew what he was thinking.

The organizational composition of Amalgam must have had some disaster occur.

Thinking from different sides, there was no plausible reason except for that. The movements of Amalgam were much more efficient and active than before.

Looking from the standpoint of Tessa and the others it was a relentless circumstance, but it was not entirely a bad thing. It was proof that the decision making organization of Amalgam had changed. An organization that was slow in making policies was now moving with quick attacks. Would that not mean that Amalgam had degraded into a pyramid shaped organizational structure?

Although they did not know where that summit was, or up to what degree.

You might say that giant, with an extremely tough defense, lived with the first chance.

With that chance, they still didn't know where its weak point was. Was it their Achilles' Heel, their forehead, or their heart? Was there a silver bullet that could damage them? They also still didn't know that.

It was a difficult battle, as usual. But Tessa could feel the stubbornness in the enemy's movement. That was the fishing line extended to the surface of the water, moving slightly-

"It's a good sign."

Tessa, on top of the Captain's seat, straightened her white knees.

The enemy had the same link rising up. Although they did not hope for the equivalent military power, at least they would want to be able to punch them on the bridge of the nose.

If they could do that, they would be able to move to the next stage.

"Godart-san, please take over the navigation. Mardukas-san, come with me."

"Yes, Captain."

Leaving the ship in the command of the deck officers, Tessa stood up from the Captain's seat. They were thinking over what should be done from then on, and what should be prepared from then on. While leaving the bridge, the communications officer stopped her.

"Captain, please wait."

"What is it?"

"A Telegram. From Mr. Lemon of the DGSE (French Foreign Information Department)."

It was a communications report barely intercepted from the unmanned miniature submarine, *Turtle*, that caught the coded message, indicated in the console monitor. The communications officer shifted her body, taking it to Tessa.

The contents of the telegram were short.

<Yamsk 11 confirmed>

<60°8'10.66"N 153°54'20.60E / File ed1258-09-02>

There were results. It was generally the expected subjects. The contact came in faster than expected.

Michael Lemon was already in Moscow. To be able to investigate it no matter what, he had risked danger and made an infiltration. At that moment they must have been preparing for immediate withdrawal. Tomorrow they would escape to West Europe via Hungary.

“Good. Erase it.”

“Yes.”

After confirming the erasure, Tessa left the bridge.

It had been eight months since the attack on Merida. Even for Tessa and the others, they were arranging preparations.

The former essential members of the Merida Island were reconstructing the supply route of the materials, source of funds and the information network. Hunter, Wraith, and the people of the information department were moving everywhere to gather information. Like Estis and the others, they were proceeding in the regimentation of their colleagues, continuing to expand their military force in steep pitch.

The Top Class management- They still don't know the whereabouts of Admiral Borda, head of the Operations Department, General Amit, head of the Intelligence Department, Doctor Painrose, head of Research Department, or Lord Mallory. They may be dead somewhere or they may be hiding somewhere.

With the words of Hunter, just before the attack, General Amit transferred the majority of the function of the Intelligence Department to somewhere, and it seemed to still be continuing to gather information from underwater. Contact could not be established, and it was not clear whether they were still allies of Mithril. Hunter, who was forbidden by the General to move,

opposed that policy and lent his hand to Tessa on his own. It was the same for Wraith.

She and Hunter were scattered to different places and got in contact with the people of the Research Department. They had even constructed that Laevatein. Proceeding in constructing it in secrecy at the same time, Tessa also heard that it was abandoned because of various problems. Ordinarily giving up on the completion of said unit, they secretly misappropriated the recovery of Arbalest's core unit. With the collaboration of one of the recovered Whispered, Miller, they configured the core unit. The AI, Al, himself completed the unit.

A unit equipped with a strong Lambda Driver was constructed using makeshift misappropriated goods and experimental goods. The Laevatein's aimed design at first was not all-purpose. A long time ago, when the prototype of the first stealth combat unit, Have Blue, was produced, it was said that the engineers at Lockheed mostly used existing parts. In connection to that "Historical fact", Sachs and the maintenance team nicknamed the Laevatein Have Red.

The other equipment was completed, but those were not estimated by Tessa and the others. They had to deal with the supplies and living allowances of the military personnel, and the equipment and dummy enterprises. They were preparing to cut through the decentralized assets.

The reconstructed Mithril had more than 2000 people, but it was limited through the damage brought about by Amalgam.

The *Tuatha de Danaan*, being the mobile headquarters, integrated all of it. Substantially, the supreme commander would be Captain Tessa.

Among the subordinates, she did not show her worried face. No matter how much her age couldn't do, there was an anxiety of pushing such a responsibility on her.

However, there was no one other than Tessa who had accurately lead them that far. Mardukas was a capable commissioned officer, he even had enough knowledge to do some of the average work of Tessa, but he didn't have what was called "Charisma". The surrounding people fully knew that he had a strict role in sermoning. And aside from Mardukas, someone who could lead Mithril was considerably not present.

Tessa frequently felt, *if only Kalinin were here.*

Although he was an adjutant, the responsibility of the subordinates and himself was reduced.

Andrei Kalinin.

After learning he had sided with Amalgam, Tessa received a great shock. He was a mercenary after all and would follow the strong side and a better compensation... Comprehending that interpretation, the existence of Kalinin inside the fleet was too great. Even though he was taciturn and had a front of rarely thinking of others, there was faith in that fundamental behavior, and everyone felt he had the pride of a warrior.

Then, why with the enemy?

After the *de Danaan* was in a standstill from having insufficient supplies after the escape from Merida Island they were able to obtain supplies because of none other than Kalinin. Then, his decision to side with the enemy was after the attack on Merida Island. Becoming a prisoner of war made him change his mind? Thinking of it then, during the battle that time he had an unusually hesitant attitude. Like he knew what would be happening- Possibly, already heard of it- and then, was vaguely disturbed.

Could it be brainwashing? He may have some important encumbrances being held hostage. What about the possibility of being affiliated with Amalgam prior to joining Mithril? Was there a much more complex reason?

But there was one thing that was clear: a terrifying opponent had joined Amalgam; that was what it meant.

No, that may not be so.

If Kalinin was an ally, then the one in Amalgam he was loyal to was her brother. If that is the case, then he had some knowledge. Could it be Kalinin was cooperating with her brother-?

“Captain?”

With Sachs’ voice, Tessa returned to herself.

“That is all, but is this alright?”

The ten subordinates assembled in the situation room were looking at Tessa with dubious faces. They were currently in the middle of a regular meeting. The maintenance head, Ed “Bruzer” Sachs, was giving an outline of the progress situation of the supplies.

Tessa tilted her head without incident.

“Eeh. What about the others?”

“The M9s are about to go bad. The Falke and E series, all three units. Spare parts are easy to trace so we can’t obtain them. In addition in no less than half a year they will need to be overhauled. Actually all three of them need to be inspected at a special plant, making use of every trick, it has considerable clutter here and there.”

At that time, in the possession of Tessa and the others were one unit of black Falke type, two units of the E series, and then the Laevatein. The Laevatein was comparatively new to the line of battle, the deterioration of the parts was still light, and the

remaining three units were subject to rigorous operations and were worn out.

“How long can they operate?”

“They are limited to three more times in battle. After that, anything can happen. During battle the Palladium Reactor might stop, or the frame would suddenly fracture, or the joints would lock and tumble down....take your pick. If we salvage one unit for parts, at the present condition they might....”

“Wait. With that, then our numbers will diminish” Mao said. “Even now ordinarily we make use of six units in battle, with three units plus one we’re already somehow breaking apart. If we lose one more unit, we can’t carry out the operations.”

“But if this goes on the three units will fail.”

“U-n...”

“That would be alright.” Tessa said.

“Before they break to pieces after three more battles, I think we can manage to provide parts. Please hold out for the time being.”

Actually the prospect of receiving provisional parts for the M9 was not present, but Tessa said it with confidence. If the countermeasures failed, it would be a waste of time for everyone. Estis or Hunter might have good news; if not the fighting power of the *de Danaan* would drastically decline.

But, at any rate--

This should already be concluded after three battles...

There would probably be no chance of having the three M9s sortie for the 4th or 5th time. If the battle were to be prolonged, it would be their loss.

“Then what about the next operation?” Kurz said.

“Our allies have started to gather. And we managed to get supplies for the mean time, and even the information network has

been reconstructed. However the whereabouts of Leonard is still unknown. Either he's still alive or not. To smash Amalgam, we need his information right?"

"There is no information concerning the life or death of Leonard. But, I think that he is still alive."

"Intuition?"

"Eeh"

Being the twin sister, she was talking about being a Whispered. Although it was not logical talk, there was no one who would reject the opinion. Being a fleet with abundant experience, they regard this kind of intuition.

"Well, originally Kaname said 'he might be dead'. It would be better to think of him as alive."

"Even then, we still don't know his whereabouts" Kurz said.

"Our information is still insubstantial. It would be difficult to come up with an efficient attack right now."

"That's right. Speaking about the previous virus problem, Dana and Al are still discussing it, and still could not come up with a conclusion."

"That's the first I've heard of. Can they debate?" Sachs asked.

"Although this was only during free hours. But it's useless. Al's questions were too difficult and Dana could not keep up."

"In terms of Dana, isn't it a strong AI?"

"That is so."

"In addition, Al is absurdly weak in chess. Playing it with Mao's AI, Friday, he lost 9 out of 10 times."

That was the first time Tessa had heard of it. But having heard that, Tessa shook her shoulders strangely. There was a different comprehension.

"Is that so? Al is an amazing AI."

“Why. Isn’t he weak?”

“It’s because he is not using equal consideration methods in the match. He wins at the same method we do. But still throwing away one win.”

“Same method...?”

Sachs knit his brow, and then the silent Mardukas opened his mouth.

“It’s instinct. A Chess Player or a Mathematician, or a reliable tactician, face the difficult problems first, making the final image come to mind first. Using only logical explanation. Like ‘seeing the future’, preceding a vision of ‘wanting to win this way’. In terms of simple games the Neumann type computer’s method has more advantage, but it is different when dealing with the complex reality.”

“Fum...”

“Concerning the definition of intelligence, let us discuss this in the future at a free time. However, that would be all.” Tessa said, purposely closing the file case loudly on top of her knees.

“There is a subtle change in Amalgam. Their decision-making is fast, and showing a resolute movement. At the same time of being in confusion, I think our guerilla warfare would be efficient.”

“Were they scorched? That’s good news.”

“Eeh. However, we may not be the cause of this.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s Leonard. Otherwise, Kalinin-san would.... What if he were to grasp the leadership standpoint inside the organization? For us, no matter how many times we crush the position of Amalgam, we were not able to find any traces of internal conflict. Then, the cause of the internal conflict, would the reason be power struggle? There is a need for us to think about this.”

“There seems to be some kind of secret” Clouseau, rarely complaining, said.

“Concerning this, catching this with the help of Lemon-san and the others, I am going to investigate this the day after tomorrow”

At Tessa’s words, Mardukas’ brow knitted.

“Investigate? You?”

“Yes. Without me the investigation would be in a difficult location. Danger is also expected; please have a number of men accompany me. It’s a far location.”

“Where is it?”

“Far East. In the ruins inside the territory of Russia.”

At that moment the *de Danaan* was in the Atlantic Ocean. If they took along the ASes as guards it would be a suitably long trip. It was impossible for the whole fleet. They would have to do their best with two units.

“That’s right....guards would be Weber-san and Sagara-san. At that time, Clouseau-san will take care of information gathering concerning the matter in the Ukraine and make arrangements. Melissa will go to South America with Mr. Courtney and exterminate the enemy position. They are troublesome seniors, but please give your cooperation.”

“Yeah yeah” Mao threw a reply.

“Answer properly.”

“Yes, Commander.”

“Fine. That will be all, regards. Please be careful and don’t make any mistakes. Well then, dismissed.”



The next day, after Tessa and the others had the meeting, Melissa Mao woke up, and noticed that she had made a most serious mistake.

Compared to her mistake, accidental firing on allies, stepping on infantry, or talking of highly classified information on an open channel were not that serious.

She was in a private room for commissioned officers. With the increase of paperwork, and substantially becoming the commander, Mao alone had exclusive possession of the small private room. For people who lived on a submarine, that was a great luxury.

In that small private room, in that small bed-
Slept a naked Kurz beside her.

With a carefree face, he slept with a good sensation.

“.....Ah~”

With a sigh and a moan, she let out a long and weak sound as she sat on top of the bed.

She reconfirmed. Of course, she wasn't wearing a single piece of underwear.

It was also not from the vigor of being drunk; she fully remembered what had happened the night before.

Just, the moment she woke up she had thought “*it would be good if it were a dream*”.

That's right, she remembered.

Late at night, after putting in order the documents for the supplies in that room, Kurz came to get a signature for another document. Then Kurz had wanted to have a talk about his trouble with an inexperienced member of the PRT. With the flow of the conversation, it turned into a long chitchat.



Then, taking out something to drink, Perrier was brought out from the refrigerator, her hands slipped and she had spilled all over the bed.

She thought that it was bad.

The Perrier wet the bed, that shouldn't have happened.

After taking care of the drinks, they then drank ginger ale, talking about getting tired of the current livelihood, somehow, and wanting to have fun at a romantic resort. In reaction to the word romance, Kurz massaged her shoulders like sexual harassment.

Saying, "Then sis, would you like to enjoy an abundant romance with me? Right here?"

As usual he was knocked off his feet, in the narrow quarters, on the wet floor –that's right, that was where the previous Perrier would come in– she slipped. Kurz took out his hand to support her, but both of them ultimately fell to the bed.

When they fell down, it seemed like she hit her head on the wall. She got a little dizzy for about two to three seconds. Then, after opening her eyes there was a face full of worry in her field of vision. With a serious voice he had said, "Sorry. Are you alright?"

With that, she very much wanted to weep.

No, actually, not really weep, but she felt like weeping.

What have I been doing inside this submarine? Why is this guy worried about me? those were what she felt.

After Merida Island was done for, it must have always been coming and then it was overflowing. Having a feeling of loneliness, having a feeling of a man with a worried face in front of her eyes... He stared blankly, looking on for a number of seconds-

That's right. That was where they kissed.

Already, what was that? There was no other way. Too pathetic. It would be okay to lose the qualification of an officer. It was an awkward situation, and embarrassing. She couldn't possibly say it to Nora and the others.

But if they were to know about it, their eyes would shine with great interest, and they would definitely ask questions. “Well, how was it?” and the like.

No, well-

That’s, Good Gracious-

What now? It was great. She hadn’t thought that they were that compatible.

She forgot herself too much. Because of that, the joints throughout her body ached. In those quarters the soundproofing was high, but would it be alright?

....ruminating the memory of the previous night, Mao turned red and blue, and Kurz beside her moaned and woke up. She knew that it was absurd and unintentionally hid her chest with the sheets.

“Uu-n....fwa.hn?”

Kurz look at her. He was absentminded for a while, and then he was also the same, cowering himself and holding his head.

“.....ah!. This is bad....”

It was a shock with a deep sigh. In addition, feeling the shock he was shocked himself.

“Wh...what’s with that attitude?”

Thereupon Kurz covered his face with a gap in his fingers, or rather inquiring, and quickly placed a complacent smile.

“Kidding. I just wanted to have a look”

After saying that he turned his hands towards Mao’s shoulders, placing his mouth on her cheeks. With his empty hand he gently held the nape of her neck and collarbone.

“Haa? Wai...stop...idiot...!”

“No no, this kind of foreplay is important.”

“Hey you! Stop...ee...”

“You were cute, Melissa.”

“Hn...I said don’t....already...enough!”

Learning from the failure last night, she fixed her body firmly on the furniture and Kurz was kicked out of the bed.

“Uo. ...What are you doing!?”

“You’re getting too cocky. Don’t look at me like that.”

Rolling the sheets, she hit Kurz with a pillow.

“Haa? What’s that? Last night you were-”

“Last night was last night, now is now. Just because we did it once doesn’t mean we’re lovers.”

“It’s not once, it was three times!”

“Don’t enumerate it. Well, that’s not what I mean. And don’t call me Melissa.”

“But you said to call you that.”

“I didn’t!”

“You did. And you said it with an incredibly cute voice.”

Mao threw a mug at his face, and he fell down face up.

“...Ah-- this is troublesome. What’s gotten into me? My heart went weak when I didn’t know.”

“Hn-. Surely that was a whack of the faint-hearted.”

After saying that Kurz laughed.

“You... have noticed it?”

“That’s cruel. I’m not that skillful.”

“But somehow, last night you were kinder than necessary from the start.”

“Usually I’m just worried. I too didn’t think something like this would happen....no.”

Kurz, with a serious face, contemplated a little.

“Hmm. I guess there might have been some secret intentions.”

“You....!”

Mao snatched the pillow from him, and hit him on the side with full force. With force without apology she hit him with the pillow a number of times.

“Stop it, hey. Ahaha. I’m ticklish.”

“What’s with that composure? I’m kinda super pissed!?”

“Alright alright. Fine fine.”

Trampling and kicking, strangling his neck, Kurz cheerfully laughed. As expected she stopped with the tiresome violence and grasped for breath on top of the bed. He looked at her profile with a meek face.

“But it seems to be fine.”

“Huh?”

“You’re refreshed right? You have that face.”

It was as Kurz said. The heavy feeling she had been carrying up until yesterday had disappeared. A feeling that even sunbathing at the beach could not shake off- another gloomy person, with drowned eyes, the compelling feeling of constantly looking over the shoulder had vanished like the mist. With only one night her feelings were refreshed. She was shocked at her own simplicity.

No. It was already like that to begin with. Eating delicious food or spending a hot passionate night would resolve the problems of most people.

This would also be good for Tessa, she casually thought...

If that girl had someone like that... The best option would be Sousuke, but he already had his sights on Kaname. His wholeheartedness was essentially a nice variety; looking at him from a distance there was an unpleasant feeling. That would be difficult, it would be best not to think of it too heavily.

When she noticed Kurz with a face of expecting something, she bluntly said.

“Well, I may be refreshed. The exit is over there.”

“Uwah, how cruel! No matter how much, that’s too cold.”

“That’s why I told you not to get cocky right? Because I have a position. Just forget it. If you tell anybody I’m going to kill you.”

That time Kurz, for real, made a deep sigh and dropped his shoulders.

“What’s with this-? I really lost confidence.... Oh well....”

“What’s with that?”

“No. Un....your attitude just now. Doesn’t that mean anyone will do as long as you demand it? I was genuinely happy but...well, I understand.”

He stood up without strength, sluggishly putting on his pants.

“Wai...it’s, it’s not like anyone can do...”

“Is that so.... but, actually you didn’t enjoy it then?”

“I never said that right?”

Kurz stole a glance.

“Then it was good?”

“Well....that’s.... that’s not it! I was worried, b...b..becoming like this, what will happen if everyone finds out-”

Grabbing the edge of the sheet with his fingertips, hesitantly, Kurz bent, giving her a surprise kiss. It was a long kiss. A simple connection of lips. Why did it have a richly sweet flavor?

“....hn”

“You really are cute, really.”

“Geez.... Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“It’s alright. I have no intention of telling anybody. Don’t worry about it.”

“Absolutely? It’s really troublesome.”

Kurz accidentally glanced at the clock in the desk.

“Duty shift is at 8 right? We still have an hour.”

“...what are you talking about?”

“One more.”

“Stupid.”

“You don’t want?”

She thought for a little, and silently whispered in his ears.

“Only once okay?”

Eventually they did it two times.

They barely made it to duty on time.

Chapter 2: On the Way to a Journey

An electrical engineer named Mitchel Danpierre, a married person with a three year service in Renault, was attending an International Automobile Trade Fair in the expo center along Moscow River. He was accompanied is his wife on their honeymoon. They were completely disillusioned by the manner of reception of the Russians. Having trouble soothing the displeasure of his new wife, he was a man who thought of quickly getting back to his home country and enjoying the gourmet and wine of Paris.

At that time, that was the appearance of Lemon.

“fuah...”

Sitting in one corner of the terminal in Sheremetyevo Airport, Lemon was having an unlucky day and was pulling his hair.

“It’s such an unlucky day” the woman sitting beside him on the bench who appeared to be his wife, Wraith, said.

Although they were unsociable words, the expression and gesture were sweet, gentle. She brushed gently the nape of Lemon’s neck, bringing her lips to Lemon’s ear. If it was to be seen by the surrounding travelers it would look like she was whispering words of love.

She was a brunet in a dress with a calm Paisley design and was elegantly wearing a simple beige cardigan. She had a high nose, sharp chin, and deep grey eyes; no matter how you looked she did not look like an oriental person. It was because she spent about 10 or more minutes every morning for such a disguise. If she were to be serious, she could become any person that no one would recognize.

With the pleasant tone of Lemon's dear wife, this partner whispered.

"Well, this is an unlucky day. I haven't slept in these five days. I pretend to be a tourist by day, and at night I infiltrate the libraries of Moscow" Lemon replied.

"The one investigating the archives was me."

"I helped a little. But the Russian language is outside of my specialty."

They were investigating through the request of Mithril's Teletha Testarossa, investigating the Russian Archives and Science articles. Roughly 18 years ago there were traces of experiments inside the Russian territory. In order to investigate documents not in electronic form, they had to travel to Moscow by foot.

"In the first place this is my first time in Moscow. For you this is probably like your courtyard right?"

"I lived her for a period" Wraith answered.

"Studying abroad? Or Lumumba College?"

"I have no obligation to answer."

"Ah, is that so?"

Lemon had already vaguely observed that Wraith was a former agent of North Korea. It was already known that Lumumba College accepted students from third world communist countries. Under the pretext of studying abroad there were people who threw them into a "spy school" from another agency. That was well known to Lemon and the people of the intelligence network.

Lemon still did not know the woman's real name. Even his "Lemon" was an alias, so he had no reason to complain- out of interest he had asked her during the midst of their travels. She had said, "you have a Japanese friend, that is why I will not tell you". He didn't know the meaning of that, so he asked a question, but somehow her face turned red face and was displeased.

She was beautiful without makeup, and had culture. And compared to the intellectual spy Lemon, her abilities were superior. She might have been a woman that he would like, but unfortunately in those five days of being a married couple there was not even a single chance for them to have personal interactions.

There was a happy result. At the end of the troublesome two nights in the Science Academy, Wraith had discovered a name of a place in an entry of the targeted document. They had made it known to the *Tuatha de Danaan* via satellite circuit. What was left was for them to get away.

There was still time before their boarding time. Lemon stood up.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m a little hungry. I’m going to buy something. You?”

“I don’t need anything. Do what you...no.”

Wraith thought a little.

“How about some chocolate, please. It would be good if it was Hershey’s.”

“What’s that? You’re going to make bombs from chocolate?”

“No. I want to eat some.”

“Hohou. A spy of Mithril that hushes when crying does have a cute taste.”

“Shut up. Just hurry.”

Gently whispering the curses, she gave him a kiss on his cheek. They didn’t know how far they were going to play- no, all of it was just an act. Lemon shrugged his shoulders, and headed to a shop in the corner of the terminal.

He got two pirozhki and a volvic, and bought some suitable chocolate. Unfortunately, it wasn’t Hershey’s. Paying with the left over rouble, the clerk, with an accent of a middle age girl, asked in

English if “he has dollars”. In truth he had dollars but he said “no” and put out the rouble, with a conspicuous face.

After the transaction and leaving the shop, a disaster occurred near the entrance of the terminal. There were a number of people in suits, asking questions from the airport’s official. That manner, that arrogant attitude, a glint of the eye ready to shoot—those were public safety officials. They were showing a picture to the officials and asking something.

The official who saw the picture pointed to a corner of the lobby. The direction of the bench where Lemon was sitting a while ago.

This is bad.

That was what was felt immediately. As far as Lemon could recall, he didn’t remember committing any mistakes that would trace their lineage and merit the Russian authorities to pursue them. Even then, there was still no indication of that. But observing that state, the one they were searching for was-

“It seems that they need something from us” Wraith muttered. She was standing right behind him, unnoticed.

Making a surprised sound she grabbed Lemon by the back of the neck and hid behind the decorative plant just in the blind spot of the men at the entrance. She had noticed the existence of the public safety officials earlier than Lemon, and secretly moved to his location.

“That’s how it is. I don’t know how they managed to sense us.”

In the first place the only ones who knew about Lemon and her being there would be Teletha Testarossa and Gavin Hunter.

“Well, what now?”

“That’s right.... No matter how we go about, it seems it won’t change the fact that we will receive severe treatment. That-”

“We run as far as we can run.”

Gripping the Lemon’s hands, she walked to a staff door in the corner of the terminal.

The door was locked. Hiding behind Lemon’s body, Wraith picked the lock. It was just a cylinder lock, and only took her five seconds. The guests and personnel didn’t even notice.

“It’s open.”

“Good job.”

Wraith slid through the door first. After confirming that nobody in the terminal had noticed them, Lemon followed.

They proceeded with a short walk down the personnel passage. They went down stairs, hiding in the shadows of the maintenance tools and avoiding the personnel. Not remembering the broad sketch, they would resign themselves to where they could escape from the terminal building.

“Do you have any knowledge?” Wraith whispered, hiding in the small storage.

“About what?”

“This situation. There was someone who leaked about us. It couldn’t possibly be Hunter.”

“I wonder about that. I don’t think that Testarossa girl would make a blunder like this.”

Before managing to speak Wraith grabbed his chest, and pointed a sharp object to his throat. It was a hidden reinforced plastic knife.

“If that’s the case, I can’t think of a cause other than you.”

“Hey hey.....”

“Did you report to someone from DGSE? No, for you to be attached to DGSE in the first place is doubtful. In any case, I should kill you here and run away to safety.”

“I see.”

Lemon failed in expressing his composed smile. With the pain of a pointed object eating into his skin, it distorted his face.

“Then, I guess it’s my end. There is no way for me to prove my innocence. There’s no lawyer or jury. And a decision of death penalty in one hearing, it’s the same enforcement. In the civilization of your native country, for someone like you who is recently married it must be an usual thing.”

Wraith’s eyes expressed a silent anger. However, just then Lemon was much angrier.

You stupid woman. Doubting your ally in a situation like this. Before you threaten a person, you should cooperate and think of a way to escape. And subsequently, having spent the past few days together, awake, are you really not concerned about me at all? She has no interest in this handsome, gentlemanly, intelligent and sexy me!

This woman, could she be a lesbian?

“It seems that you’re angry.”

“Aah, I’m really angry. You so quickly want to perform the death penalty. Let me tell you one thing, I know your secret.”

“What did you say?”

“Yesterday, just to kill time, I searched the net for Korean female names. Being blessed as a linguistic genius that I am, I noticed it within an hour. Your real name. Your family name is probably ‘Kim’. In kanji it can be inscribed as ‘Gold’. You’re name ‘Yun’ probably has the meaning of beauty right? See I thought so. It shows on your face. It seems that it is inscribed as ‘ball’ in Kanji. ‘Yunhi’ which is ‘ball’ and ‘girl’, that’s your name, right? In other words, if you write your full name in Kanji, to a Japanese person it would bring inevitable laughter-”

{TL note: Lemon was implying that Wraith’s name, when spoken in Japanese is “Kin Tama Hime”, which means “Testicle Princess”}

“Stop it....”

“Well, kill me already. Why don’t you send me to hell like you said?”

Wraith applied force in her arms. With her face flushed, the reason for it was not only anger. She wanted to stab the knife into his throat with vigor, but she reconsidered immediately, and made an unpleasant sigh.

“How stupid. I quit.”

“Then you should be like this from the start.” Lemon murmured with rough breath as he fixed his tousled shirt.

Wraith took out her small note book with a sketch of the airport in it and scrutinizing for an escape plan.

“If you go underground, there would be a pipeline that gives provision to fuel and sewage. If we go along that we can get out of the terminal building.”

“That’s splendid. But is there no other way of saying it?”

“What?”

“‘Sorry’ or ‘Pardon’”

“Shut up.”

Telling him bluntly, Wraith hurried first. Running on the crude stairs used by personnel, they headed for the materials passage underground. It was a damp and humid place. The indications in the passageway and guide map were in Russian, which was difficult to read due to the long passage of years.

“There.”

Inside the slim passage, Wraith raced to the hatch. The hatch was locked with a chain and padlock. From the top floor, considerably far away, were several footsteps. The voice of an officer shouted “hurry (dawai), hurry (dawai)”. Those traces were the characteristics of men who had received training. There was also the sound of wild breaths- those were probably police dogs.

It was only a matter of time before they found that place.

“This is bad. They brought dogs.”

“I know.It’s open.”

The lock opened and the chains untied, the two of them opened the heavy hatch. For a woman to open the hatch alone would have been impossible.

“See, you couldn’t have run away alone. It’s good that I’m alive, right?”

“But it’s finished. I’m going to kill a sticky and persistent man.”

“wha...”

“It’s a joke. Let’s go.”

Wraith hastily went down the hatch. Lemon followed after. Cutting the silver paper from the chocolate that was bought in the shop before, she put it in between the closed hatch.

“What are you doing?”

“Buying us some time.”

When the pursuer found the hatch, they would notice that silver paper, and would be careful thinking that it was some kind of trap.

“We’ll be caught up to if you’re slow. Hurry.”

“I’m hurrying.”

It was gloomy in the underground passage, the different sizes of pipes and cables occupied the majority of the space. They must not have had any good maintenance. There was water leaking from the pipes forming a haze, and the irritating odor of the jet fuel got in their noses.

They walked for three minutes. Without a satisfactory field of vision Wraith’s back was steadily going far off. Guessing by the number of steps they had taken, they should have already moved

500 meters. In their position, they had calculated that it was already outside the terminal building—

“Let’s get outside.”

With one directional decision by Wraith, they quickly went up some nearby stairs. She did not break a sweat. On the other hand, Lemon was already exhausted. Just like jogging, he thought it would be easy to cross the distance, but because of the extreme mental tension he was quickly out of breath.

They went up a number of floors in a dancing path, and unlocked the locked door at the end. Coming out of the door, there was a small conk-

It was a small room. There were machines used for guidance and disaster prevention supplies everywhere, and a number of colored cones.

Getting out of the small room, in front of their eyes was the guidance path of the international flight. Blue guidance lights were blinking in the twilight. Just 100 meters ahead a giant passenger plane passed by with a tremendous roar.

Behind them there was a fence to outside the airport.

Lemon was overpowered by the intensity of the Jumbo plane, and Wraith pulled his arm.

“What are you doing? Hurry!”

Walking out in haste, they could see the jumbo plane on the far away guidance path suddenly braking. It was a quick stop ordered by the control tower. And then, from beyond, from the direction of the terminal building, a number of vehicles with turning lights could be seen. They planned to chase over to them.

“Dammit.”

They had been sniffed out after all. The stalling was considerably ineffective.

They might be overdoing it already- there was an exit, but there might be no significance anymore, so they should stop. Even with her running forward, she already knew about it.

The fence they were heading towards would be difficult to climb over. Even if she were to step over his shoulder, she might not be able to get away. Having that kind of appearance, he couldn't do what he wanted to- suddenly Wraith turned to a halt.

“What’s-”

Before he spoke he noticed. Something was rising in the small bank of the fence in front of them. Since it was dark the bank was hidden and couldn't be seen well. The shape of a single man appeared.

Still young. A juvenile.

His silver hair lingered in the night wind. He wore a red coat. It was a heavy, dark, blood-like red.

The light of the guidance bulb illuminated the profile of the youth. He had slim and well featured contours and his slit eyes shone like they were wet. In an instant, Lemon had mistaken him for a woman.

It seemed that Wraith recognize the opponent. With a voice close to a shivering, she muttered intermittently.

“Leonard.....Testarossa....?”

Why is it you? Why in a place like this? What is happening?

Although that was what her heart was muttering, Lemon also understood just by picking up her hand. The youth was Leonard Testarossa. He was a leader of Amalgam whose life or death had been unknown. He was also the brother of Teletha Testarossa.

“It’s been a long time. Ms. Agent of Mithril” Leonard said.



With one step, and another step he appeared in front of them. With graceful features, he expressed a smile that looked like eating a man. No, that was a much more poisonous smile. He could see through just about anything- thrusting away everything in the world and looking on-

“I also came to Moscow for some minor business. You were careful about that document. It’s because you were investigating something very interesting, and I incidentally heard the details. And then had the local public safety authorities look you up.”

It was not a leak. They don’t know how he knew, but the one who had sniffed them out was that man.

On his forehead was a large scar.

Although it was elegantly under the curl of his forelock, the length of the wound stood out. It was like a sealed third eye.

“Did you bring enough company?”

“Un....I secretly brought them along, it was because you guys got away. I estimated it, so I anticipated you here.”

“Move away from there.” Wraith said, Leonard only shook his shoulders and let out a single breath of “ha”.

“What would you do if I don’t move? Will you come at me with that hidden knife of yours?”

“.....”

Wraith suddenly couldn’t move. Probably because, from experience, she knew she was no match for him. She whispered to Lemon.

“What was that?”

“I’ll make good your escape and let your comrades know.”

The car that had already come out of the terminal building immediately drew close. They don’t know whether they were KGB or not, but they were brimming with spirit going over there to make arrests.

They didn’t have a second’s delay.

“Wait, I can’t possibly do that--”

“Do it.”

Saying it, Wraith charged forward.

He didn't knowing whether that desperate strategy was popular. In defiance of the barbed wire, it was unknown if a single person could climb over that high fence. And then, running away with a woman as a shield, as expected it was unknown if that was allowable.

But there was no time to hesitate.

Lemon smacked his lips and thrust forward, running towards the fence at full speed. In one hand, she took out the said knife, and drew it toward the enemy with a lethal thrust.

“I”

By no means was her attack weak. And of course it was neither magic nor sleight of hand. Leonard's movement was quite small. The knife's point was purposely strayed, in the next instant her body was vigorously rotated in the air. With only one hand raising the wrist, held lying face down, Wraith raised a muffled voice.

“Don't mind me, go!” she called, with Lemon continuing to run.

The fence was right in front of him. He ran upwards. Suddenly the strength of his right leg fell out. There was a scorching pain running up his thigh, with the sound of a gunshot resounding in the neighborhood at the same time.

Leonard, holding Wraith down, with his empty left hand took out a pistol and shot. He had accurately aimed at the running leg of Lemon.

“.....!”

Lemon fell down just like that, with his head colliding with the fence. He recklessly grabbed the wire mesh, somehow standing, but his right foot was not moving. He dropped like a log.

“Lemon...uh!”

Wraith let out an anguished voice and the joints of her arm twisted.

“You guys, even now seem to misunderstand something.” Leonard said, whispering in Wraith’s ear. “You know about my sister right? Surely her head is so-so, but her athletics are completely weak that she doesn’t even know how to use a gun. Her image is...”

“...let go....”

“You must think I’m also like that. Then that would be unexpected.really unexpected.”

Leonard put weight on the upper part of her body and a shivering sound reached Lemon’s ears. The joints of her shoulder was dislocated.

“Ah...Aaaaah!!”

The first time her girly like voice came out was caused by agony. She wanted to put her fist into that man, but her body would not listen.

“What an unexpected voice. It’s sexy.”

Saying that, Leonard gently chewed on her ear, slowly licking her cheek with his tongue.

Then a dazzling brightness of headlights came over them. Security cars arrived and the footsteps of public safety people with submachine gun in hand could be heard.

“What are you doing here?” The officer shouted in accented English. Not at Lemon, but towards the direction of Leonard. He replied to the officer in fluent Russian.

“As you can see. I’m capturing them alive.”

“I told you to leave everything here to me didn’t I? Stop doing as you wish, hand those two over. You also throw away your weapons.”

“Hmm. Why is that?”

“You are a suspect of injury and unlawful trespass. Come with us.”

Not knowing what the details were, it seemed that their relationship with Leonard was not in friendship.

“I see. A change of mind, huh? I could imagine who would suggest that.”

“Restrain them! Kill them if they resists!” the officer ordered his subordinates in Russian.

The ten closest people came out with weapons in hand. No matter how many shots they took, in front of that number of muzzles resistance was not possible. From the runway, two armored cars drew close. But Leonard did not lose his presence of mind. He shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

“Really.”

The distance between Leonard and the officer was about ten meters. In the middle of it there was a distorted, large quantity of blue and white phosphoresce scattering about. The AS, rendered invisible by the ECS, forced its way through them.

It was a unit never before seen.

Black armor. Acute angle form. A reassuring smart direction, a silhouette of a reverse triangle. It resembled those types called Codarls. That AS had a slight variation. It was not a simple weapon or industrial good, but something more demonic.

“Y...you bastard....! Where did you....”

Wraith was beginning to let go, Leonard drew out his right hand quickly. Similar to his movements, the black AS moved its right arm forward.

“Enough. Disappear.”

Like a conductor of an orchestra, he elegantly swung his protruded right hand downward. The black AS turned its right arm

towards the men below it. Sliding the lower arm, exposing the internal cannon-

Discharge.

More than firing, it was close to an explosion.

The car was also pulverized in a single blow of the high caliber cannon, and the impact on the ground spanned a few meters. In one second close to ten shots were fired. The officers did not even have time to scream, they were literally erased.

“.....”

The vehicles they were riding on were blown away, exploding, blazing. The flying small fragments of the concrete landed on Lemon. The echoing shots and explosions become strange in his ears.

Like a voice laughing at someone from somewhere.

The one laughing was Leonard.

His silhouette was illuminated by the flaming explosions. His big shoulders shook and he was covering his face with a single hand. Although it was being endured, it was the laughing voice of a person who was getting nauseated. There was no particle of madness in his tone of voice. Like a laughter on an unseen play during baseball or soccer. Just then, he murdered ten men.

The black AS turned its face, extending its hands to the ground. Glancing at the shuddering Lemon, Leonard jumped to the chest of the unit with dexterity, and sunk into the cockpit at the hatch located on the back of the head.

The two vehicles attacked. The projecting cannons in the turrets were like unreliable peashooters.

The AS fired. The armored vehicle split in half, sliding on the pavement, engulfed in flames. He continued to shoot at the other vehicle. It burned up in flames.

“What a mess....” he finally said.

Such a battle had unfolded in Moscow and even at the airport; that was not the state of sanity.

“Lemon!” Wraith called.

Protecting her unmovable right arm, she somehow managed to get up. The fence situated some distance away from them, had one side fallen. The fragments of the vehicle that was blown off struck the fence and fell down.

With her free left arm, she was beckoning. Like she was saying, “*Now, let’s get away using that hole*”.

He looked down at his own right leg. His pants were soaked in blood and attached to his thigh. His foot was numb and his ankle was in pain. He was thankful that the nerves were still connected, but to run away would be impossible. Maybe it was the fault of the bleeding, but he couldn’t keep his consciousness clear.

Lemon shook his short neck, with just a gaze it told her, “*I can’t. You get away*”. For one to two seconds there was a hesitation in her facial expression, but she immediately reconsidered. Making a slight nod, she ran to the hole in the fence.

Even though there was pain each time she breathed, Wraith’s movements were nimble. She crossed the bank through the hole in the fence and her form disappeared in the middle of the darkness.

Leonard’s black AS ran into the AS of the security-fighting with two blue-coated RK-92 Savages. Bringing up the transparent gravitational field he repelled the attacks of the Savages. It was that Lambda Driver. Previously, Lemon knew that Sousuke’s Laevatein had made use of it in Mexico. That was the first time that he had seen it that close.

Counter fire. At once the two units were destroyed.

The airport was a sea of fire. The building and passenger plane had received the flowing bullets, the destroyed vehicles were lying about, burning, and the faltering sound of an alarm resounded.

The black AS turned its head and stepped to the fainted Lemon, grabbing him violently.

“Uh.....”

“One person is not enough. Where is she?”

It was Leonard’s voice from the exterior speakers. The head sensors scanned the circumference of the airport. Even with hiding in the thicket, Wraith would be discovered with the infra-red sensor.

However, it seems that there was no reaction.

“Oh well. Let’s go.”

Grabbing Lemon with one arm, the AS started to ascend.

It flew to the skies, like a helicopter or something. There was no jet engine or lift fan. It was not even using the gravitational field as far as Lemon could tell. The unit silently rose to an altitude of 100 meters, accelerating at high speed towards the western direction.

The wind was cold, the wound was hot.

He didn’t know how Wraith had managed to elude Leonard’s eyes.

With a dislocated shoulder, she couldn’t possibly get away. She might still be on the bank-

Seems to be dead

In the corner of Lemon’s dizzying consciousness, he thought of the profile of the girl whom he would never meet again.



Sousuke was also accompanying the particular “investigation” that Tessa was talking about. The target place was ruins Far East in Russian Territory.

The two Pave Mare transport helicopters mostly flew continuously for 40 hours.

It was 40 hours.

A long travel time was unavoidable. After taking off from the *de Danaan* in the Atlantic Ocean they would cross North America and cut across the Pacific Ocean via Alaska, flying to get to the Magadan in the Far East, traveling a semi-circle across the world. If it were a winged transport they would cut the travel distance by one third, but they had to travel by helicopter in order to transfer the two ASes as bodyguards- the Laevatein and an M9.

The current Mithril had no convenience relay base or transport network. In the past, for the transport of ASes over that kind of long distance, they would disassemble and load them in a transport, and then reassemble them at a nearby secret location. That was how they did it.

But that time was different. They were in a state of maintaining the detailed supply route.

Even then, from Sousuke’s perspective, he thought that the long journey would be a good converter for Tessa.

However even inside she would not stop working. She stared at the screen of her notebook PC, reading something, driving into something, instructing the AI of *de Danaan* far away, and having a serious discussion over the satellite circuit.

She didn’t seem to sleep.

The worried crew of the helicopter suggested that she take a rest, Tessa meekly obeyed and was covered with a blanket in her seat. But both her eyes were open, reflecting in the windows. In the deep darkness outside, she was staring absentmindedly.

Sousuke really didn't know what should be done.

He tried talking to her a number of times. If he were to be worried about her health, she would smile and reply with "I'm fine", if he asked something about work, she would politely answer the details. However, that was all. She would shake off any other topic. Gently looking his way, she would just say "is there anything else?" with an indirect expression. And Sousuke would say "....thanks".

Furthermore, Sousuke had nothing to talk to her about.

The last supply point of the flight route, a cargo ship called *Bernie Worell*, was cruising along the Bering Sea in the Kamchatka Peninsula.

On the outside it looked like a container ship registered with Liberia, but scattered here and there were the previous essential base members of Merida Island, obtaining with difficulty a disguised supply ship. If the containers were withdrawn, five large helicopters could land at the same time.

The two Pave Mares, who flew all the way from the Atlantic Ocean, landed. The pilot said they would "make inspections before refueling" since after that there would be around 2000 kilometers of round trip flight. While invading Russian territory they had to always keep the ECS on. It was also reasonable for the prudence of the pilots.

It would take at least an hour for them to check the helicopter, so Sousuke decided to go outside and do light exercises. If he were to cover the three sides of the 300 meter length container ship it would be a little jogging. Among the ship's members that he passed by, mixed in were faces he recognized as those from his time on Merida Island. Every time he met them he would stop and chat.

Eventually he stopped on the side of the ship. Leaning on the rail near the pontoon bridge, he stared at the sea.

It was early morning. That area of ocean was usually rough, but that day's waves were strangely calm. The light of the rising sun on the east horizon let out a dazzling shine on the reflecting waves. The cold of the refreshing sea breeze was comforting.

"The checking will still take some time" Kurz finally came and said.

He had been riding on the other Pave Mare. The M9 loaded over there was his unit. That time only two units were on their mission; Mao and Clouseau were in another place carrying out another mission.

"I don't know 'some time'. How many minutes?"

"Dunno? Some time is some time. Hey- nice view."

Kurz let out a sound of admiration of the scenery from the deck. Looking at that profile, Sousuke remembered a physical discomfort. Something, face being slick....strangely existing...

"What. Staring like that..."

"No..."

Speaking of which, it had also been unnatural before their departure. There were many things being discussed about the ASes for Mao and Clouseau, but Mao and Kurz hadn't been speaking to each other. Like an atmosphere of suddenly being distantly cold.

"Did you have a quarrel?"

"With who?"

"With Mao."

"uh...."

That was another strange reply. Why would Kurz make his words short? He looked over, looked down, and looked at the bridge behind him.

"Why do you think that?"

“You seem to have a different mood than usual.”

Clouseau particularly did not notice. Even the others. But Sousuke was sensitive to the slightest change of atmosphere between the two.

“Well, it’s not strange that you’ve noticed....”

“So what happened?”

“N-no. It’s not like we quarreled. What’s with the worried face? Stop it, it’s really nothing.”

“Then that’s good.”

It wasn’t that he didn’t want to know anymore, but if the person himself didn’t want to say it, Sousuke wouldn’t question him. However, Kurz changed his mind. Since he was grumbling to himself, he somehow decided to say it himself.

“Un. I guess, it’s not. I’ll only tell you.”

“Huh?”

With an attending face, Kurz brought down a meek face.

“Hey Sousuke. You’re a genius at not being able to read the atmosphere.”

“Is that so?”

“That’s right. That is why, if ever, for whatever reason, this secret is leaked out, it would be risky. I’m going to face that risk and speak my mind. Why you say, because we are the strongest trio. No, strongest would be too much, anyway a good trio. That’s why I can’t hide anything from you. First you have to understand this.”

“I don’t quite comprehend, but I understand.”

“‘I don’t quite comprehend’ is not necessary.”

“I understand.”

“Alright. Don’t tell this to anymore. Absolutely.”

“I understand.”

Moment by moment Sousuke nodded. It seemed to be an important matter, and he was becoming tense by hearing it. Did Mao have some kind of sickness?

Were her relatives mass murdered? Did she witness an extremely rare UMA (Unidentified Mysterious Animal) during a mission?

“...well, actually...”

He cleared his throat with an “*ahem*”. Kurz was moving his fingers restlessly. It was such a great secret. Sousuke was also tensed to his shoulders.

“That-, well. Actually....”

“Actually?”

“Actually...the day before...that, I slept with Mao.”

“Is that so? Then?”

Sousuke bent forward, with Kurz knitting his brow.

“Then..... that’s it.”

“Huh?”

“Aren’t you surprised?”

“About what?”

“No, I mean I slept with her. That’s what I’m talking about.”

This time Sousuke knit his brow.

“I really don’t get it. What about sleeping with her?”

“Slept. This is bad isn’t it...?”

“While on a mission, you mean both of you dozed off?”

“No, I’m not talking about that kind of sleep. Ah-, that’s right.... you don’t understand. You’re....you’re....”

Kurz hung his head with both hands scratching his blond hair, grumbling about something. Mixed with German, Japanese and English, what he was saying was not understandable.

“Whatever it is, explain it so I could understand easily.”

In Sousuke's manner of speaking, Kurz finally shouted in despair.

"It's SEX, SEX!"

That voice echoed to the vicinity, then immediately the form of Tessa appeared coming out from the pontoon bridge nearby, mostly at the same time.

"....."

Tessa stood still, frozen with her eyes round. Kurz and Sousuke were also stiff. It looked like she had borrowed the shower onboard. She was in a loose field uniform and a bath towel was hanging from her head.

"Ah....well...."

Kurz's eyes were swimming in the air, finding words. As expected, Sousuke, who finally understood the meaning, was in confusion at the appearance of Tessa. He was not saying anything and a cold sweat was pouring down his back.

"A, um... I seem to be interrupting."

Tessa was embarrassed and turned around.

"No, your mistaken, Tessa."

"That's right, Captain. We were talking about how many pounds of explosives it would require to sink this ship--"

"You shut up."

"In other words we're talking about Semtex. Plastic Explosives."

"That's right, Semtex, Semtex....that's what you heard right!"

With the exchanges of Sousuke and Kurz behind her, Tessa hurriedly headed back and returned to the pontoon bridge. Did it damage the mood or dumbfound them, or was it both? Anyhow it was an awkward instant.

"Aah~...."

Kurz hung his head, heartbroken.

“Don’t worry, Kurz. She won’t tell that to Mao.”

“That’s not the problem. I’m just thinking of the severe punishment.”

“It can’t be help if you regret that past. Let’s go back to what we were talking about.”

Then, with a tired face, Kurz waved his hand.

“You understand now? That kind of relationship.”

“Is that so?”

“...you’re not really surprised.”

“No, I’m surprised.”

He observed the sullen face of Sousuke narrowly and rudely.

“Doesn’t look like it.”

“When talking about these things, I don’t know what kind of expression I should show.”

“You’re the same as usual....”

“Um”

“A lot has happened with Kaname, I thought I had progressed a little.”

“.....”

Remembering the face of Kaname, he suddenly felt a tightening in his chest.

He had not been able to gather any news relating to her. He thought about leaving his friends and trying to search for her alone, but he didn’t know where to begin. At that time he shouldn’t be thinking of unnecessary things, to fight Amalgam with his colleagues would be the best. Kalinin was with the enemy right in front of them. In the same direction, there was no mistake that she was also there.

“This is really sudden.”

“No problem. Then, when will the ceremony be?”

“Ha?”

“The wedding ceremony. Committing such adultery you should be able to take responsibility, right? Since Mao has a high salary, 100 heads of cheep might not be enough.”

“You’re thinking too much....”

“You’re not going to get married?”

“Nope....I really don’t know. Well, I also don’t seem to feel like playing around. Also the day before we departed-, I was summoned after the briefing.....”

“Fm”

Sousuke also remembered that. When the briefing was over and dismissed, Mao called Kurz with a cold voice. Like “Your report still has imperfections” or “Are you still not yet finished with the ammunition expenditure”. With a serious appearance she started a drawn out lecture complaining about the issue. Sousuke and the others thought “he’s going to get scolded again”. Not minding it, they had got out of the room.

“....if there’s no one around, she would say ‘be careful’, wrapping her arms around my neck and kissing me. It was such a rush. Then, secretly by the storage next door, we do it. She says that we can’t do it in a place like that, but there was great excitement in a situation like that.”

“.....”

Sousuke mysteriously thought. From before, why did he feel a killing intent for his partner....? It was a feeling different from jealousy. Whatever it was called, it was close to a feeling like if he was hungry and somebody was eating extravagant cuisine to their relish.

Aah. This is what they call “irritated”.

“But-, the words ‘I love you’ were never said. It was not said no matter what. Do you know what this means?”

“It means that there is no love, right?”

“Hey...”

“In the first place, I’m the wrong person to talk to.”

“...Well, that’s right. But I don’t have any other person to talk to. And Mao said absolutely not to tell this to anyone.”

“You told me.”

“You’re different. Mao also acknowledges you.”

“Why only me?”

“I told you before right? We are partners. Among the team-”

“There is nothing to hide.”

“That’s right.”

Kurz popped his back, grabbing the back of his head shaking left to right. Without a strange or bad mood.

Then, from beyond there was a sound of a rotor. Looking on, one helicopter was coming from the Southeast skies. It was an old UH-46. The tandem rotor of the transport helicopter slowly descended, dropping electric cables on the deck, and it landed beside the Pave Mares.

Alighting together with the cargo from the container was someone recognizable. A small wide man with glasses. It was Gavin Hunter of the Intelligence Department.

Hunter, recognizing the appearance of Sousuke, shouted with a big voice that would not lose to the exploding sound of the Turbo Shaft Engine.

“Looks like we made it in time. There are presents for you from a pretty girl.”

“Present?”

“The ‘fairy’s feather’. It’s completed.”

The crew of the helicopter all worked together and the unit that Hunter transported, the “fairy’s feather”, was installed on the shoulder of the Laevatein. They hurriedly connected it. Hunter, the one responsible for the manufacturing, was making technical exchanges with the sailors and crew, always coming and going between the deck and pontoon bridge.

In that interval Hunter stood around and talked to Sousuke. The topic of conversation was not the aforementioned unit, but about Kalinin.

“It’s certain that he shot me.”

Revisiting his encounter, Hunter told the truth.

“I was near death. But, I still don’t know if he had intended to kill me.”

“If he were serious he would have shot you in the head?”

“That’s right. But, it may be alright for him either way. Either for me to live, or to die.”

“.....”

He knew of the relationship between Sousuke and Kalinin. Hunter changed the topic.

“Anyway, how is the Laevatein?”

“Not bad.”

Saying it, he added the memory of his reason for surviving.

“I thank you.”

Hunter laughed.

“It seems you remembered your courtesy, boy. If you want gratitude, you should thank her.”

He pointed at the girl. In the direction of the heliport, beside the electrical unit, she was talking with Tessa. Somebody he had never seen before. She was wearing an orange work suit with an olive flight jacket on top, with slightly reddish blonde hair flapping in the sea breeze.

“She’s the noted doctor of AI. Do you remember Matt Shade?”

“Aah”

That man from April last year, before he had even met Chidori Kaname, was the Intelligence Department agent who was injured in Siberia. Although he had managed to take the girl out of the Research Facility of the KGB, he had died right before Sousuke rushed to the scene in an M9.

“It’s the girl from that time. She’s recovered.”

Sousuke lightly hit his chest, Hunter returned to his work.

That time....?

He didn’t recognize her immediately. The girl in his memory was more worn out, and not able to talk to people like that. With the influence of drugs it was dubious that she was able to walk with her own strength.

The girl was talking with Tessa. Although it was like a casual conversation, there was something strange about those two. There was no hesitation in both of them like a first meeting would have. It felt like they had known each other from the past, that kind of atmosphere. Sousuke had seen it before.

He immediately knew. Like the atmosphere between Kaname and Tessa.

Tessa noticed the direction of his gaze first. Continuing on, the girl turned her head. Tessa made a small gesture with her hand, beckoning. Sousuke made a small run towards the both of them.

“You called.”

He informed with a posture standing at attention. Tessa said “relax” with a bitter smile. Sousuke took a relaxed posture, and Tessa introduced her.

“This is Miss Sarah Miller. Miss Miller, this is...”

“I know.”

The girl who was introduced as Miller smiled.

“Mr. Sagara Sousuke. I was told about you before. Way before.”

“....aah”

Although the memory remained, the conversation from that time felt like it was from a previous life. It was only one and a half years ago, he had this strong feeling that there was a complete change into another person.

Not Miller.

Himself.

Leaving the awkward start of conversation between Sousuke and Sarah, Tessa headed to the pontoon bridge, confirming a number of items with Hunter who was waiting.

“I heard from Miss Miller about the performance of the ‘fairy’s feather’. Though there is no guarantee that all of it will work. It’s the usual. Also, there is no opportunity to use it this time.”

“I don’t know. There is some bad news.”

With only those words and tone, she could guess what Hunter was trying to say.

“The explosion incident in the airport in Moscow?”

“Yes. The presence of Mr. Lemon and Wraith was confirmed. Although 30 hours have already passed, there’s still been no communication from them.”

“Is that so...”

“The place that you will be going, there is a high sense of danger.”

It was understood that Hunter was implying to “suspend it”. But she had no intention of backing out.



The transport helicopter that carried Sousuke and the others took off from the cargo ship *Bernie Worell* and headed east in the Bering Sea. Although it was daytime, in order to activate the ECS, the scenery from the windows were dyed a purplish-sepia color.

Because of the stupidity that had happened onboard, it was even more difficult to talk with Tessa.

To bring up that matter then would be stupid, to say it- no, to be bothered by it in the first place was not the problem.

“Can I have a moment?”

He was startled by Tessa’s voice. The girl who was suddenly beside him without being noticed was peeking there from her seat.

“Yes, Captain.”

Even then he still refrained from calling her “Tessa”. More than the problem of affinity, it was an uncomfortable feeling. Having practiced in calling her by rank, it would be crazy to change that mood.

“When are you going to get on the AS?”

“30 minutes before descent.”

“Then its way before that, right? Can I sit here?”

“Please.”

Taking away the books and documents from the next seat, he threw them in a suitable bag. After Tessa gave her gratitude, she sat down beside Sousuke. He knew that she was a short girl, but somehow she looked smaller than before.

Sousuke waited for her to speak.

For one minute, she was quiet and stared at the back of the seat in front of her. What exactly was she thinking? He could try to guess, but he couldn’t think of anything.

“Are the injuries alright now?”

“Huh?”

“About you. In the city called Namsak, you got badly injured.”

“Ah...yes. No problem.”

“Is that so? That’s good.”

With that Tessa sank into silence again. Perhaps, she did not know what should be said. Unable to bear the awkward silence, he started talking.

“Captain. I apologize for what happened.”

“About what?”

“On the container ship, with Kurz...”

Then her head made a small shake.

“Aah. About that. Please don’t worry. When I first got on the *de Danaan*, knowing that there is somebody beside me, I spoke with a loud voice with people around. It was a modest harassment. But, it was something from the long past.”

“Ha....”

“But Sagara-san also talks about those things...”

“You’re mistaken. That Kurz on his own-”

“I know. It’s about Melissa, right?”

Looking at a surprised Sousuke, Tessa raised a reserved smile. Even though she wanted to give a bigger expression, she thought that she did not have the qualifications to do so.

“I heard it from her. She told only me. How I am to Melissa, must be the same as how you are to Weber-san”

“I see.”

“But even then, it was unexpected. Those two.”

“Yes. I was also surprised.”

“Well, I don’t really know how they got together. But Melissa seems to worry about it. The age difference, and not being unfaithful.”

“Is that so?”

Sousuke, mobilizing his power of imagination, was thinking about the image of those two “getting together”. But he couldn’t think of anything positive.

“But, it might be unreasonable to have them in the same team” Sousuke said.

Tessa, nodding, seemed to also have that expectation.

“Can I hear your reason?”

“I don’t mind valuing your comrades. But you cannot go too far. If necessary in a point number of seconds, it is Mao’s job to make the decision to abandon Kurz or me. I do not know how it will cloud that judgment.”

“That’s right. If Melissa heard it she will be outraged.”

“It’s not that I doubt her capabilities or impartiality. It’s just, if it were me-”

Saying that much, Sousuke noticed.

If it were an ordinary person it would have already been known long beforehand, for him it was at that time that he finally understood.

Tessa herself once carried a complication with him.

Getting close to Tessa because of her good will, in the end he could not cross that line. It was not because of his own cowardice that he did not return the words. Having noticed this obvious thing himself, he was utterly amazed.

And then, knowing the difficulty in Tessa’s position, Sousuke suddenly thought.

It would be good if there won’t be that much difficult thinking.

Forgetting that it was his own problem, that’s how he felt. She was not strict.

At the same time, that thinking also applied to himself. Even for Kurz and Mao, wasn’t it a difficult way of thinking? It

was certain what he said himself- there was no difference in the capabilities of the team. If he were to be slow in making the decision by a point few seconds, there might be disastrous consequences. But, how do you say that? In the helicopter they were flying in right then, there was a point something percent ratio that a breakdown would occur and they would crash.

If you were to enumerate an insignificant sound argument, that itself was insignificant-

“What’s the matter?”

Not noticing his meager progress, Tessa made a mysterious face.

“No. What will be, will be.”

“Huh?”

Sousuke made a little exaggerated shrug of his shoulders.

“We can’t take charge on how we will get sick. We should continue to cooperate like always, if something bad happens then we should think about it then.”

“Sagara-san, that’s different from what you said before.”

“Yes. I changed my mind.”

“How strange...”

“Is that so?”

“Random words like ‘what will be, will be’, were something that you never used before.”

“I see.”

Saying that, it may be so.

“What’s the appropriate issue?”

“There might be a possibility of being dead. Please think more seriously.”

“Hm...”

He looked at Tessa's eyes without any reserve. Aside from a little bewilderment, he could see nothing besides deep weariness and irritation. He felt pity about that.

"I'm always serious. Even then, even now."

"Is that so?"

"The issue is about you. You think to change the world. Exerting effort in elaborate thinking, making the impossible possible. Continuing to think seriously."

Tessa's brow crumpled.

"What do you want to say?"

"I'm not making fun of you. Practically, you are a superior person of prodigy. What an average person like me cannot do no matter how hard I try can be easily done by you. With a stronger will than anyone. The situation is still harsh, but you will probably win."

"Of course that is my intention. That is why even now I'm--"

"Exerting effort, planning, adding adjustments, fighting. That I already know." Interrupting her words, Sousuke patiently continued, "It's good to challenge fate. But no one can control fate. Can you control the weather or make an earthquake?"

"If necessary I can think of it. If you can freely use the data and statistics, you can acquire its closest approximation effectively."

"That's the problem."

"What about that isn't good?"

"You are not a god. You're an imperfect and weak human. It's natural to feel the responsibility of the lives of your subordinates, but to even control the fate of your subordinates, that is a misunderstanding. I've returned alive from a number of places I thought I'd die, I might die tomorrow tripping on a paved road. I'm telling you stop worrying about things like that."

"I don't understand."

He grabbed her sleeves with the full force of his fingers.

“No, you already knew. Whoever dies, you take the responsibility. Taking the punishment yourself. And then, vowing to take revenge on the enemy, you’re so obsessed with destroying the enemy that you are burning yourself out.”

“That’s right. But, what do you do at the grave?”

It was a difficult question that couldn’t be answered.

It was the same for him. He blamed himself for many things.

But Sousuke thought of an extreme lie. Hesitating, wondering if he should be saying it or not, he tried to answer back with an extreme reply.

“Let’s stop this already.”

“Eh?”

“Disband Mithril. Sell off the *de Danaan* somewhere, and send everyone to a comfortable daily life using that money. It’s not like Amalgam would destroy the world. Ignore the conspiracies and have fun.”

Tessa made a stunned face.

“What about Kaname-san?”

“It’s enough. I’m sorry for Chidori, but forget her. Then I’m going to request to date you. And then we could head to Guam, it would be alright for the loudness of Lt. Colonel Courtney and the others.”

“SAGARA-SAN...”

At the reprimand of Tessa, with a red face of anger, Sousuke calmly reacted.

“It’s a joke”

“Obviously!”

“Wasn’t it interesting?”

“Ee. Completely”

“Is that so? It’s a hard thing, saying that joke.”

Being the first recipient of the first joke of his life, it ended in a misfire.

“Strange person.”

“So to speak. But- the first bit, we should do it.”

“Huh?”

“If we finished what we have to do, that submarine and the ASes should be sold. And then everyone should enjoy life. I’m going back to school with Chidori to study. And then I’ll become an ordinary man. A man that does not need weapons.”

Tessa was surprised, but Sousuke was even more surprised having those words coming out of his own mouth.

“An ordinary....”

“You, too, may someday become like that. A woman that does not need weapons.”

“.....”

“Even for the dead comrades, that is what they would wish for.”

Tessa no longer refuted. Staring at her fingers situated just above her knees, she muttered without strength.

“....that may be.”

“Eeh”

Making a deep sigh, she sunk into her seat.

“Sagara-san. You’ve changed.”

“Everyone does. Even you’re not unchanging.”

Tessa did not answer. She lowered the tip of her cap, moving it to cover her eyes.

“I’m somewhat tired. It’s Sagara-san’s fault”

“Sorry.”

From under the flight jacket placed on her knees, she took out her hand and held Sousuke's hand. Although it was unseen from their surroundings, he was startled.



The slender fingers gave a smooth and pleasant sensation.

“I understand. But I forgive you,” Tessa whispered. “With only this. Only this is alright....”

With that she fell silent.

He waited for three minutes, but there was no reaction.

Calling on her, she was already soundly asleep.

“a man that does not need weapons” huh...

Remembering his own words, Sousuke felt depressed.

It would be good if that were to be true- but it was probably, impossible. He had already killed so many people. In the end, what he had told Tessa might have been just blind hope that he told himself.



Oh well, it seems that you're still alive.

Lemon made a sigh of relief, looking absentmindedly at the fluorescent bulb on the short ceiling. It was unpleasantly cold. He was sleeping on a stretcher. Water dripped nearby. There was a feeling of tight bandages on his leg. He could see a somber white wall and a rack full of medical devices.

It was a narrow room- no, it was inside of an ambulance.

Along with the clatter and tremor, it was not bad. They were probably running along a paved road.

In the corner of his vision he saw a person move. An unknown man. Noticing that Lemon had woken up, he brought his masked face nearer.

“Does it hurt?” the man asked.

It was with an apathetic voice, like looking at a patient. Lemon remembered the dentist attending him during the time when he was a student. *“I’m shaving of the tartar, Jan. It’s painful*

but please bear it.” “Gari, gari, buchi! Doctor, I’m not Jan but Paul.”

“I hate dentists....Aah!”

Lemon shrieked when his injury was pressed. It was the gunshot wound that Leonard Testarossa made. He started to remember his own work as the pain passed through. The man checked his blood pressure and pulse, and pushed down the bottom eyelids of his right eye with a thumb, flashing a light.

“Can you say your name?”

“Where is this place?”

“Say your name”

“Say it or not. Where is this place?”

“Hmph”

The man lightly beat Lemon’s cheek, and then his field of vision disappeared. There was the sound of the slide door opening and closing. It seemed that there was no one else inside the car. It was strange. Wasn’t the ambulance running? When the man left, nothing happened.

Several minutes, no hours, passed. His muddy consciousness getting clearer, Lemon finally understood.

He was inside a transport.

He could hear the sound of the Turboprop engine. The ambulance must have been inside the storage room. After a few dozen minutes there was a big jolt and an impact that supported his interpretation. The inside of the car cluttered left and right, and the tremor went silent. That kind of state didn’t seem to have a good runway.

The transport stopped. The sound of the hydraulic device opening and closing came from the rear of the unit. The engine of the ambulance started. The car was moving outside. After moving

a little it stopped, the door opened. A strong white light gushed in; the piercing cold of the wind was blowing.

“.....”

Two men stepped in. Someone from the outside was shouting “wait a minute”. It was the voice of a girl. Young.

“Are you going to abandon him!?” the girl asked.

Wasn’t that a Japanese accent? An accent that was similar to that of Wraith or Sousuke.

“On this cold mountain? You’re not going to kill him! I’m not kidding!”

“But, we were ordered to let you ride this car.....”

The man, who was taking care of Lemon earlier, answered with an insolent attitude.

“I don’t need a nurse. Didn’t I say with only sleeping? My temperature went down!”

“Telling us this suddenly would be trouble. If we were not to do as we’re told-”

“Is there trouble?”

A new voice. He heard footsteps trampling on the snow. He knew that voice. It was Leonard Testarossa.

“Ah.....”

The voice of the girl with authority was suddenly concealed.

“It’s been a long time. Unexpectedly you seem to be doing well.”

“Ah...you too, aren’t you doing fine being fatally injured.”

“It’s because of you. It’s clearer now. In so sorry to have pulled you out like that after you just recovered....!”

There was the sound of a slap, a small scream, and the sound of the girl on her knees in the snow.

“W...what...”

The girl had an appearance of not hiding her shock. Not because she was treated that way, but was surprise at Leonard's violent handling.

"It's a greeting of change of plans. My strong patience is already lost. I'm already bored with my gentle face. So- this is important, and time is already running out."

"I...is that your true nature? You're strange."

"Fine whatever. From now on we will....hey, close that."

After Leonard said that, one of the men banged the door shut. He was grateful the piercing cold wind was cut off, but he could no longer hear their conversation. With the obstruction of the engine sound and the bulky doors, he could only barely manage to hear the muffled voice.

Leonard said something. She strongly protested.

Leonard raised his voice. The girl mustered her courage, and somehow asserted her position.

And then between them, a long gloomy exchange continued. Whether it was related to his fate, Lemon could vaguely discern. He had not even seen her face yet. Who could that girl be? In the end, where was that place?

Where would they be going from there?

While he was repeating the questions without any answers, the door of the ambulance suddenly opened. The men stepped in and rudely grabbed his stretcher. Would they be taking him out like that? He was not even wearing many clothes.

"Wait...."

But that was the only resistance. The men were moving the stretcher back inside the ambulance. They fixed it onto the metal bed and went out of the car. After the nurse and a large built bodyguard-like man had entered, another girl went inside.

The girl was the one disputing with Leonard and his subordinates.

She was a beautiful oriental girl.

She wore dark jeans and a red jacket. She had glossy black hair that reached her waist, and elegant eyebrows, like they were drawn by an impressionist painter. Looking at her smooth curves, he thought that the numerical value of the contour could be attributed to the Fields Medal.

Unfortunately the color of her face was not good. It must be because she had just recently recovered, as was mentioned in the previous conversation. On top of that, her right cheek was red from the slap she had received. Essentially her big charming eyes were bloodshot; there were traces of tears in the corners of her eyes.

The girl was sat down beside where Lemon was sleeping, and was repeatedly scrubbing the sleeves of her jacket over her mouth. Rubbing with strong force, she was not worried about her lips getting cut.

“First let’s get the temperature-”

“I don’t need your help.”

Sweeping away the nurse’s hand, she settled on top of the seat. The ambulance started running again, and inside the car was a heavy silence.

“Um....”

Lemon raised a nervous voice. The girl did not respond.

“Hello, young lady.”

“Are you talking to me?”

Finally realizing the existence of Lemon, the girl replied.

“That’s my intention”

“What do you want?”

“Well....I really don’t know the circumstances, but I think you are the benefactor of my life?”

“Not really. Before getting on to the other airplane they were going to throw you out into the snow, I only asked them to stop. I don’t know what kind of person you are, but it seems that they are finished with your interrogation.”

So that’s how it is, Lemon comprehended.

His consciousness was not clear since he woke up; it was because they had used truth serum. Without him knowing, they must have heard the necessary things. If they used the latest truth serum, no matter how strong your will was, resistance was futile.

His own secret code or hidden house, even escape routes... Lemon was praying that Hunter and the others would hastily abandon them. No, they would be alright; the problem was the ruins that were investigated in Moscow. Although he didn’t remember anything, there was no mistake that he said those things himself. They might be heading to those ruins.

Then, the ones in danger were Tessa and the others- without expressing his sense of impending crisis, Lemon told the girl.

“In other words, you are the benefactor of my life. Thank you very much.”

“That was just self satisfaction. I don’t even know you.”

Bluntly saying, the girl turned away.

“Then let’s get to know each other now. Michael Lemon. Nice to meet you.”

He took out his left hand from under the blanket, seeking a hand shake. After Lemon introduced himself, the male nurse, who was looking, snorted. The girl sighed and gripped his blood-dried hand.

“Yes yes, nice to meet you. Satisfied?”

“I somehow understand. You’re Chidori Kaname, right?”

“Eh?”

The girl's eyes turned round, and she took a long hard look at Lemon again.

"You don't need to hide it. I'm a friend of Sousuke."

Lemon heard about the girl, Chidori Kaname, from Sousuke. Although he hadn't seen a photo, he knew her age and characteristics. He even knew about her being kidnapped by Leonard. Naturally he could guess.

After hearing Sousuke's name, she was again surprised.

"You know Sousuke? He's-"

After saying that, Chidori Kaname remembered the existence of the observing men sitting nearby and shut her mouth.

"Don't mind us. We're still in the palm of your hands."

Laughing sarcastically, the men made no reaction.

"...is he alright?"

"Aah, he's lively. He's going wild together with Al. He will definitely get you back."

Then, she could no longer bear it. Both her hands covered her face. With a little incomprehensible voice, she muttered some Japanese. "...YOKATTA (thank goodness)" could be heard. Lemon didn't understand the meaning, but he could guess what that word was.

That's right, this girl-

Raising her covered face, the shoulder of the girl trembled. Looking at her figure, Lemon could feel an unspoken pain.

She must be a good girl. Also beautiful.

Naturally energetic, cheerful, courageous, and empowering those who were around her. And also she loved Sousuke.

Nami was like that.

Isn't this too harsh, Sousuke?

No, don't, don't....

Inside his heart he felt the impulse of “*this girl is also wounded*”, Lemon blushed himself.

That girl was not bad. That girl has no responsibility. Many things had happened after meeting Sousuke, it would be better to stop those words-

After rethinking, he said with an overdoing cheerful voice, “I’m kinda jealous. Being loved like that.”

“....un”

Wiping the tears with her fingers, she lightly smiled.



From the open circuit of the wireless radio of one of his subordinates, Kaname’s conversation was passed directly to him. They should have already known about that, they did not regret being overheard.

His head hurt.

With the carefree drama unfolding inside the car, he was not bored. He took off his ear phone, and hummed outside his mood.

The Real Me by The Who.

Can you see the real me preacher? Can you see the real me, doctor? Can you see the real me, mother?

His head hurt.

They were in the Tyva Republic, which was south of Siberia. The distance from Moscow was about 4000 kilometers. After transferring to a transport, he had come from Sri Lanka and joined up with Chidori Kaname. From then on, they headed towards the East. He thought of a troublesome Christmas present from 18 years ago. A thrown away wrapping paper. That person would also come.

It couldn't be helped that his head hurt.

Essential information had already been taken from that man called Michael Lemon. Essential?

Not necessarily essential. Reconfirming what was already known, that was just information to make sure that the progress went smoothly. What were they investigating in Moscow? In other words, pointing out what his sister had noticed.

There was no longer any worth to the information of the man called Lemon. Which was why he had ordered to have him thrown out. But, being obedient to Chidori Kaname, he made use of that man's life.

The life of a complete stranger... how long did that girl plan to accompany him? Leonard remembered the taste of the sensation of her lips from a long time ago, and chuckled. What was she thinking with serious eyes, expecting to understand his sincerity, he could not believe it even then. How far would be gentlemanly? It was unexpectedly impossible. Then someday- No, that was absurd. It was enough. It was like that from the start.

Aah, that's right.

That was the first time in his life that he hit a woman. He had been pushed to kill a resisting woman, but hitting one like that was a first time.

Long ago, having lived one time in a poor section of Austin, he had seen prostitutes who were standing in the road. They were definitely following a pimp. The previous him had looked at those pimps. To do hanky panky with the clients, the prostitutes, who were resisting with dirty words, were beaten by the men. They would discipline the prostitutes with rough treatment, and then gently say "sorry for beating you, I love you, Baby".

He truly thought that it was an absurd process, but it had turned smoothly, that world. A world with only rubbish, base

emotions, and impulse. A world that did not need intelligence. Wasn't Chidori no different? Expecting that itself was absurd.

She was the same. She was an animal after all.

It was not because of disappointment. After recovering from the wound he had been enlightened on that night. He began to understand many things. Then even for himself, it would be alright to be associated with their style. In any case their world could not continue that long. To act without restraint, what inconvenience had it caused him?

His headache would not go away no matter what.

It was strange. He felt like he had forgotten something, and he could not remember it no matter what. He once had it, now he no longer had it.

No need to worry, someone in his head said. No matter what you can remember, it's already useless, it's only excess baggage. A plane that does not plan to land wouldn't need legs, right?

You are already flying away.



After Wraith had gotten away with her life from the carnage at the airport, it was impossible for her to repair her dislocated shoulder on her own. Having no method of contacting Hunter, she was on the verge of losing consciousness with the pain and fever.

In the end, she managed to get to an apartment five kilometers away from the airport and hid in a nearby garage, then fainted. For how many hours, she herself did not know. Probably, when she fainted the resident saw her and reported her to the

authorities. When she woke up a number of policemen came into the garage, pointing their guns at her.

She did not have the spare energy to resist and run away.

She was taken into the custody of the local authorities.

After understanding the extent of her injuries she was transferred to a nearby hospital for observation.

With rough medical treatment her shoulder was realigned and she was prescribed unknown pain killers and sedatives. While she was completely exhausted in the hospital room a uniformed officer finally came.

It was not the KGB that were chasing them at the airport, but the military intelligence department- an officer of the GRU.

Would she be handed over to Leonard, or would she be executed? In any case she was already resigning herself for the end. The GRU officer spoke something unexpected.

“I thought you were an excellent student. But it seems my expectations were different.”

It was someone that she knew. He was around his 40’s with deep gray eyes, a bald head, and an impressive hook nose. From long ago, he was one of the instructors while she “studied abroad” in Moscow, a time when she was still a girl who believed in the justice of her fatherland.

“Captain Kirilenko....” Wraith muttered.

He pointed his finger to the insignia on his uniform.

“I’m a Lt. Colonel now, Yunhi. If I had arrived three minutes later, you would have been inside the car of the KGB (Chekist) by now.”



Two kilometer before the objective point, in the mountain range from 800 meters altitude, Kurz's M9 made the first descent.

He operated the ECS and secured his sniping position, confirming that there were no threats in the surrounding. Nimble following Kurz unit was Gebo 4, a Pave Mare transport helicopter. While flying about the objective point it scanned for the existence of danger with its sensors. In that moment Kurz continued to be a lookout if, by some chance, there was an enemy ambush

After five minutes, Gebo 4 and Kurz informed that there were "no enemy sightings".

"That's fine. Then let us head out as well" Tessa informed the pilot with the onboard phone.

It had also reached the ears of Sousuke. Another Pave Mare, Gebo 6, was where Sousuke's Laevatein and Tessa were riding. It leapt over the short mountain district. The image in the optic sensor of the helicopter was also transmitted into the cockpit of the Laevatein.

It was a desolate scene. Like the end of the world.

The ground was orange colored. The trees and shrubs had grown, but were being covered by the height of the grass. At that time it was barely autumn. That area would be trapped in deep snow soon. Practically, that neighborhood was visited by a fierce cold for the whole year.

At the moment the local time was 16:32. In the mountain range to the west the red sun was sinking. No man made things could be seen in that direction. There were only the traces of road and power lines.

In the ravine, a town could be seen.

A town area which was constructed in the basin with a radius of three kilometer.

A line of residential areas were built around the flat roof residence, in that direction a short building was sparsely built. There was a plaza in the center of the town, and a large bronze statue could be seen. When the helicopter got near, they knew it was a statue of Lenin.

The name of that city was Yamsk 11.

It was one of the “secret cities” constructed in the Russian Territory. Mainly for the sake of researching nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles and other highly classified information, the research members and their families had migrated into that city. The name of that city did not exist on any map. Even the name Yamsk 11 was for convenience, it was a postal code for the administration of the neighboring major cities. The security was rigorous, it was forbidden to go in and out without permission.

But the city at that time seemed to be in no need of security. It had been abandoned a long time ago, a town in ruin.

No people could be seen. Dark red rust and ruins of rusted automobiles were left here and there in the road. Grass was growing in the cracks of the asphalt and collapsed road signs had moss growing on them. The dwelling places were also in terrible condition. If you looked closer the majority of them were broken.

The walls had fallen in decay. Roofs opened with big holes. A house had been tossed like a press. Cracking from the weight of the winter snow, it was left there as is.

Built in secrecy, abandoned in secrecy, that town was forgotten.

In the database of Mithril, the name of that town did not exist. Just the other day Tessa had managed to get her hands on information about the town by the efforts of Lemon.

Far from the enemy, that place didn't seem to have been approached by normal humans for ten years. And it may have been meaningless to search for threats.

"Damn, this is an eerie place" the pilot of Gebo 6 said. "In the neighborhood near the countryside of Nevada where I lived as a kid, there were ruins that felt like this. The 5000 residents, it was said that they all disappeared in one night. It was rumored that in one night all of the residents were murdered. With some sort of experiment by the military, the residents were attacked. All the adults laughed at it like a ghost story, but even those who transferred from that place to our town didn't know anything."

"Ooh, scary scary," Kurz laughed on the wireless radio.

"...well the truth is, the only car factory in that town was shut down, and nobody lived there anymore."

"What, how boring."

With the exchanges of Kurz and the others, Sousuke fell to a strange sensation.

A déjà vu. Such a landscape... it was like he had seen it before. No- on the contrary, even the conversation of Kurz and the others, he felt like he had heard it before. What was that sensation? Later, Tessa would surely say something-

<It is a strange sensation.>

It seemed like he was mistaken. The one who spoke was not Tessa but Al.

<In front of me, I feel like I have been here before.>

"What's that?" Sousuke said, being surprised at Al having the same sensation as he did.

<The coordinates, and the geography does not correspond the previous operational data, but I have a feeling of "I have seen this before".>

“But it’s surely strange. I also felt like I’ve been here before” Kurz said.

“Me too. I wonder if it was shown on the news?” the pilot of Gebo 4 said.

Not only that, the other crews also in succession complained that “I also have that feeling”.

“This might be the absentmindedness of the head due to the long travel, please brace yourself. We will now get close to the plant of the town.” Tessa said that just as the voices started to drift into anxiety.

“Could you tell us about this already, Tessa? What’s in these ruins? In the first place-”

“I’m sorry, but I still can’t say”

Interrupting Kurz’s complaint, she instructed them again.

“We’re now going to land on those ruins. I’m going to go in, Sagara-san you be my escort. Leave the Laevatein behind.”

Chapter 3: Yamsk 11

The transport Helicopter that Sousuke and Tessa had ridden flew away, and they visited the neighborhood with an ominous silence. The two Pave Mares and Kurz's unit were standing by at a third site, five kilometers from the ruins, and would only pick up Tessa when she contacted them. The pilot of Gebo 6 had demanded that they wait in the area, but Tessa had quickly refused. If by some chance the enemy attacked, being hidden at a far away point would allow them to react easier.

The cold wind of the twilight fluttered and weeds shook with a weak whispering sound. The remaining echo of the helicopter's downward air current echoed a delayed eerie shriek in the nearby pillar of the building.

"This way."

Tessa, operating a digital map on a portable computer, started walking towards the Northwest direction. She was wearing training shoes, shorts, a thick sweat shirt, and a loose flight jacket. A bag filled with plastic explosives was hung over her shoulders, but she carried no gun. The place seemed like a place to have a picnic, but with the scenery of ruins it would not be enjoyable.

Sousuke wore a black pilot suit with a tactical vest on top. His weapons were a 5.56 mm caliber carbine gun with 6 reserve magazine, a hand grenade, a smoke bomb, and two incendiary grenades. He was also carrying as much C4 explosives as he could hold.

And also the usual Glock 19. After his near death experience in Namsak Lemon's colleagues had picked it up. Although not an excellent pistol, he had grown attached to it because of using it for nearly two years.

“Where do we go from here?”

“To the Plant at the north side” she answered.

She looked at the distance of the road and quickly walked on with a pondering face. Sousuke fell silent and followed behind. Certainly there were no signs of the enemy, but he thought that it was unnatural to let him be the only guard. In order to have a sure escort, it would have been better to have the armed crew of the helicopter accompany her.

Seeing through Sousuke’s doubts, Tessa said, “Is it a mystery that I brought you along alone?”

“Yes.”

“The truth is I intended to come here alone. But if I were to choose someone, I think you would be the most competent.”

“Huh?”

“The secret of Whispered sleeps in here.”

Not minding Sousuke’s surprise, Tessa continued.

“You are the only person who uses the Laevatein. The one who created it was Miller-san, using the basic system of AI and the Arbalest. The one who created that Arbalest was a person called Bani Morauta. The one who directly rescued Miller-san was also you. I was also saved by you by a number of times. And the one whom you have to get back no matter what is Kaname-san. The one who has the most encounters with Whispered, even if you search the world, it would be you Sagara-san.”

If she said it that way, it might be so.

Although there was no positive proof, if Nami, who he had lived with him in Namsak, was one, that would be an additional plus in names. Leonard was also the same. He still didn’t fully understand, but he was also a Whispered. With that, in regards to those rare people with special abilities, he had a deep connection to six Whispered.

As usual, Sousuke didn't fully understand the thing about Whispered. But coming all that way couldn't be concluded as coincidence. He could feel some sort of destiny.

"I don't know whether this is coincidence, or a special kind of fate. Even if I look at this, I believe in God. No matter in what shape, if God does exist, Sagara-san, in order to save us, you might be the savior that God had sent us."

"That's...."

A savior was no joking matter, Sousuke thought. It was certain that there was a strange coincidence, but he was only a soldier. He couldn't do anything except to shoot bullets at a required place, he was only a man. He was unable to save Nami, and he didn't know if he would be able to save Kaname.

However, to Sousuke on the ship's deck, the girl named Miller had also said something similar.

Such words were no jest. She thanked him with regards to Siberia, while he said his thanks for her regarding Al and the Laevatein. Miller herself was generally recovered, and was working in cooperation with Hunter's Information Department. Sousuke also had explained in summary his own condition.

And then, when she was about to leave, she said with a smile, "*Although there is no basis for this, you may be the one who will save us—*"

"It's not that I'm putting pressure on you" Tessa said gently. "It's just, that is the mysterious feeling that your strength makes. In an old Chinese proverb, there is a saying 'Before God presents you with a great mission, that person shall be given great suffering to test his strength'. You have continued to suffer all your life. But, overcoming that suffering would cultivate that strength. It is the same as rebuking a useless girl like me. Even though you were living in the madness of the battlefield since you were small, why

have you not lost that gentle heart? There might be meaning in that. Possibly to ascertain our ruin--”

He was surprised at her words saying “useless girl like me”, but he still welcomed her perseverance of such a joke. He did not deny such impossible words, but only expressed it through impression.

“I don’t really understand.”

“Me too. But I am only telling Sagara-san all that I know. That was what I was thinking.”

Tessa stood to a halt, and turned around.

“That is the reason why I brought you here.”

Sousuke was hard pressed for a reply; she only smiled and headed forward. For a time there was only the sound of their footsteps and the sound of the wind.

When they came about the residential district, Sousuke immediately noticed the wreckage of an automobile in the road.

There were bullet holes.

There wasn’t only on that wreckage. If he looked carefully, there were smashed houses and building, and even the road surfaces had traces of bullet holes and explosions. There were also apparent traces of great conflagration.

There was battle in this city....?

The two of them were getting close to the North side of the abandoned secret city.

In that area were the remains of a large chemical plant. Rusted and complex structures intertwined close together. The residential district hung about a different eeriness. There were a number of extended pipes and chimneys that had fallen to a black shadow, and hollowed rows of silos and tanks. It had a sense of a corpse of an unknown giant creature that was long past dead.

“Captain. This city...”

“In the current Russia, there is no one who knows about this city. With coup d’état and civil war, the records are mostly lost. Even in my work, I managed to investigate the existence of this city but- there were no results. But recently, we managed to get a hint. It’s Miller-san. From her observations in the sealed up institution in Siberia, the name of a certain person came out. With the difficulty of that person’s circumstance and the results of Lemon’s investigation in the public documents in Moscow, we managed to ascertain the existence of this secret city, Yamsk 11.”

The chemical plant seemed to have been involved in battle.

The unnatural collapse of the silo was noticeable. Several tanks were lost from the base and considerable fragments of pipes and steel frames were rolling on the ground.

“Please be careful, Sagara-san” Tessa said. “This plant seems to be the center of the explosion. It’s not really harmful to the body, since it’s already been 17 years I think the effect would be little, but it will confuse the mind of those who approach.”

“The mind?”

“Yes. The experiments that were conducted here were extraordinarily special. Probably, there are facilities underground.”

Tessa operated the digital map and surveyed the panoramic view of the plant.

“Please be careful, Sagara-san” Tessa said. “This plant seems to be the center of the explosion. It’s not really harmful to the body, since it’s already been 17 years I think the effect would be little, but it will confuse the mind of those who approach.”

“P...please wait.”

Being attacked with an unexplainable ominous feeling, Sousuke interrupted her words.

“What’s the matter?”

“Just now, didn’t you just repeat what you said?”

“Aah”

With an appearance that was not especially surprised, Tessa nodded.

“Déjà vu, right? This is also one of the effects. Even before we landed Weber-san and the others said it. You felt it too, didn’t you?”

“I felt it.”

“Having everyone fall back away was also because of this. This might feel bad, but please endure it. If you preserve your will, usually it won’t happen. There are many occurrences of déjà vu being stupefied.”

Sousuke could feel a drop of sweat on his back. How could she be so composed?

“Then.... are you alright? This...”

“Yes. For us, this usually occurs. We usually don’t tell this to others, you won’t even notice it if you grew accustomed to it. Nevertheless for an ordinary person, they usually experience a light déjà vu right?”

Sensing the manner of Tessa’s speaking, the occurrence of such phenomenon was not frequent. Still, he possibly couldn’t get used to it.

“Let’s go. It is probably just ahead.”

Tessa, minding her feet, entered the plant.

“It might be better to talk about something possible. Did you notice the bullet holes?”

“Yes. Rifle shells, Cannons, RPG Explosions....it seems to have been a considerably flashy gunfight. Exactly what happened...”

“Probably. It’s the cause of the experiment” Tessa said, straddling a rolling pipe on the ground. “I think it was such a pitiful and disastrous occurrence. The residents of this secret city, their minds must have been contaminated by the experiment. Much

worse than this déjà vu, they were in a much more serious condition. When the confused guards started attacking, it must have escalated from then. There are no detailed records, and no people to give testimony, and we don't know what happened....”

Tessa recited that with a heartbreaking voice. The confusion that occurred there must have been something unspeakable. Did those who lost their sanity commit limitless violence? There was no difference from true hell. Looking at the traces of battle, Sousuke could imagine that much.

“Exactly, what kinds of experiments were conducted here?”

“The Visheojaya Sphero experiments.”

“Visheojaya Sphero?”

“In English it would be ‘Omni Sphere’. ...although it’s a long story, please listen.”

Tessa made the introduction, and started the explanation as she walked.

“The Omni Sphere is a territory which was made by the mind of men. A world which cannot be touched or seen by the eyes. The Omni Sphere could not be observed by standard physical sensors. It is a totally different dimension from the usual recognized world we have. At the same time, the Omni Sphere mutually interferes with the material world. The chemical circuits that are passing through the brains of humans are able to access this Omni Sphere. The opposite is also affirmative.”

“I really don’t understand-”

Looking at Sousuke’s appearance of being not satisfied with the explanation, Tessa made a smile.

“I’m sorry. It must be too forward. Actually the general idea of the Omni Sphere originated from the past. It is the imaginative and philosophical implications. It may even be called the ‘spirit world’. In the Greek manner it would be the world of

‘Idea’. In the words of Jung it is close to the general idea of a ‘collective unconsciousness’.”

Suddenly speaking of the occult, Sousuke was bewildered. For Tessa, who led a modern war using the latest weapons, it was such an inappropriate topic. However, he did remember hearing of the Omni Sphere before. The *de Danaan* or the Arbalest, and now loaded into the Laevatein. Words that were related to the man-machine interface called TAROS. Surely TAROS was an abbreviation of “Transference And Reaction Omni Sphere”.

“In the distant past, there were many forms transcending the mental world. The Brain Quantum Theory and Complex System Science, and the development of a super large scale operation device, these were scientifically described, utilized and thought of by a genius. A person called Demitri Valov. He conveniently called that world ‘Domain that comprehends all (Omni Sphere)’. There was no article remaining concerning the Omni Sphere, but before the first half of the 1970s, the Soviet Science Academy was researching Telepathy and Future prediction.”

“Telepathy, you say.”

“The Philadelphia Experiment or the UFO of Area 51. There was a lot of dubious talk about those, right? Surely those talks were questionable, but the American-Soviet institution researching supernatural abilities itself were true. Mostly, the success of either was not achieved. Created from wanting the budget of the army and intelligence institution, there were many random researches made.”

He remembered what the pilot of Gebo 6 had said earlier, “soldiers going mad from the military research and so on and so forth” was another story. While living in Tokyo, Sousuke

remembered that such subjects were present in the TV programs that Kaname and the others watched.

“But, Professor Valov was different. While he contributed to the field of Nuclear Energy, Information Engineering, and Electrical Engineering, he was also a true researcher. Like the first Passive Stealth technology, the basic theory applied was thought out by him.”

Proceeding inside the plant, the footing worsened. The stairs of the sunken half floor were rotting away. Sousuke went down first and held out his hand for Tessa. Because she was slow, she jumped into the arms of Sousuke and safely landed.

“Thank you, Sagara-san.”

“No. Please be careful where you step. Because of the conflagration, everything is damaged.”

“Yes.”

Tessa took out her flashlight and then proceeded further inside the plant.

“I don’t know what circumstances made Professor Valov notice the existence of the Omni Sphere. Anyway, for some reason he was convinced of the existence. And with the success of a small scale experiment, he managed to get suitable results in the closing years of the 1970s. At that time, the appearance of Professor Valov’s name was extremely limited in official documents and scientific records. From an outsider’s view it may be seen as if he was an old researcher with his fortune declining, but it was natural to be interpreted that his research would be treated as an important secret for his country. He also seemed to have political strength inside the academy. And so to be able to press forward his research at once, this secret city was constructed....”

He was being attacked again by déjà vu. He noticed that he was listening to the talk about Professor Valov a number of times. Sousuke, shaking his head, asked her a question.

“Why was his research an important secret?”

“The value of using the Omni Sphere. There is a world that would not be restrained by time or space, and be able to move your own mind freely, being able to access our physical world at will, do you know what kind of possibilities there can be?”

“I can’t imagine so.”

While imagining, Sousuke could not understand half of what Tessa said. The explanation of difficult theories and numerical formulas, about time-space or mind, it was a difficult question for a realist like him.

“For example, an extremely high precision prediction can be made. When an enemy will attack with a nuclear missile. When would an important political leader of the enemy die? What would be the weather of the day of the planned attack? Earthquake or, that’s right, when would large scale solar activity occur? If you knew of an accident that the enemy did not know, how will you be able to win a war?”

“I see....”

“You can also use telepathy. Over an area of distance which ordinary communication is impossible, you could exchange a large amount of information. Contrary to that, peeping into the head of another person, and make suggestions to control him. Or if you could ‘hack’ into the head of the president of the United States or Secretary of National Defense, there would no longer be a need for wars. This could be controlled by the superpowers.”

“If these were possible-”

“It may be possible. Speaking in theory, it is possible, there are countless technical hurdles to be crossed. But if you make use

of the Omni Sphere, by no means are these pipedreams. Even the most important secret of a country would no longer be a mystery, right?”

“Eeh”

“There are still more. To be comparatively simple, making use of Omni Sphere is an interference technology that affects the physical world. It is a system that converts the image of the user into physical strength. This is already in practical use.”

“Do you mean the Lambda Driver?”

“That is correct. However, the name of that equipment is used as a masquerade. An ‘equipment that drives the Repulsion (Lambda Driver)’, or it can also be called ‘Hollow Cord Repulsion Field Generation Device’, what the device produces is not only repulsion. A device that amplifies the quasi physical phenomenon that was produced by the interference of the Omni Sphere. It’s original name is ‘Omni Sphere High Velocity Connection Interference Reactor’”

“‘Reactor’?”

“Yes. The general idea of it is of a reactor. Originally, the interference of the Omni Sphere in our physical world is weak. The behavioral effect is to the degree of a feeble molecule. From our habits, even without knowing ourselves, the Omni Sphere passes, affecting the surrounding substance and energy.”

“That is.... in other words, this is how I see it but, it moves the surrounding substance?”

“Yes. That itself is being done unconsciously by anyone. The significance of it is that everyone is an ESPer. However, those effects are not observable and minute, and anything happening could not be seen by the very eyes. What is unfortunate is that with strict experiments such phenomenon could not be observed or verified. If it were possible to isolate in a room the effects of the

outside environment, it might be possible to observe the Omni sphere's interference reaction to the physical world. But making those observations are humans themselves using scientific and electrical machines, the surroundings will definitely have noise, if that noise was ordinarily measured-"

"I'm sorry Captain. I absolutely cannot understand...."

"Ah...I'm sorry. Anyway, it means that any humans have a small amount of Psychokinetic Power."

"I see."

Sousuke thought, even with a bad companion that made the blood in her head circulate, being able to be modest and kind enough to explain was one of her personal virtues.

"And then the ordinary occurrence of micro interference reaction, the Lambda Driver connectively amplifies this. The brain and the nervous system of the Human is like an engine that is produced by the Omni Sphere's interference reaction. An AS loaded with a Lambda Driver increases the human's enormous electrical energy that the human nervous system could not bear, which is not possible in the natural world- that is the reason for the drawing out of unusually strong interference reaction. Previously, it was said that the 'Arbalest was another you'. That is the reason for that. It's not like it will copy your personality, but the Arbalest or Laevatein traces the many sections of your nerve activity."

"Ha...."

"Sagara-san, you were thinking 'why aren't aircrafts, tanks or battleships equipped with Lambda Drivers' right?"

"I was. That way would be more efficient, right? No.... if that's the case, then could it be...."

"That's right. In order to operate the Lambda Driver, a unit that imitates the function of a human is required. Moreover the interference reaction of the physical world created from the Omni

Sphere, such catalyst will be subject to the extreme condition of humans, further more will become evident upon rational behavior. The peerless concentration of an experienced soldier, the circumstance produced from such mental state... in others words, something that is essential in battle. Therefore, the condition for a machine loaded with a Lambda Driver, is having a source of power with a high output, the characteristics of being able to survive when participating a dangerous battle, and a vehicle that imitates a human body.”

“In other words, an AS.”

“That’s right. Because it’s an AS, it is the ideal machine to load a Lambda Driver. Well then- with that, don’t you think that the existence of a weapon called AS itself is strange? Even though it is a humanoid from that would be inefficient in battle, why would the AS take a leading part in land combat? In such a circumstance, unexpectedly becoming the ideal weapon.”

Tessa was speaking in a manner implying that the AS was developed in order to load the Lambda Driver. After Sousuke escaped from North Korea, he remembered Kalinin saying that “these things should not exist”.

“Then....AS are practically useful in the battlefield.”

Surely for an AS, there were weaknesses that were not present in other weapons. It was easily discovered by the enemy at level ground, and could even be easily shot when vertically walking. The maintenance and production of such a complex system were not easy. Even then, the size of firearms and its armor fell short of a tank.

However, compensating for such weak points were advantages. If not, nobody would use an AS.

“That’s right. This is something similar to the saying ‘which came first, the chicken or the egg’, not a single person that exists in the world would be able to ascertain this.”

“.....?”

“I’ve seen it.”

While proceeding with their talk, the two of them moved further inside the plant.

From the cracks of the countless steel frames and plumbing the little illuminating shine of the orange skies would not reach that place. Without change there was a wide hall in the room, in the floor in front of them was the opening of a giant pit.

The diameter was close to 15 meters. The gaping wide pit continued deep underground. Cables, pipes, and maintenance scaffolds were surrounding the pit, on their opposite side was a solid rail installed.

The pit looked like a shaft of a giant elevator. The pallet that moved up and down had fallen down the shaft. If by chance one looked down at the hole, it was engulfed in darkness, with its depth indistinct.

“Will we be descending here?”

“Yes. The target facility is below this shaft- since it is deep underground.”

Of course the elevator had broken down. In the first place there was no electricity in the ruins. In the middle of the shaft an undependable scaffold and stairs were combined with the steel pipe, and then a rusted ladder was present. In order to get down you needed to use the stairs and ladder.

Nonetheless, it was a facility abandoned close to 18 years ago. There was intense deterioration. It had the danger of unexpectedly collapsing.

“Please wait. Can you wait outside?”

“What do you mean?”

“It is dangerous to go down from here. I will go explore myself. Captain please instruct me from up there.”

Even while having the tools for descent like rope and carabiner ready it would not be easy to go down in the pit. He would be able to go down by himself somehow, but Tessa was there. Without having any experience in climbing down... to begin with her athletic ability was, pardon the term, seriously undependable.

Such reasons Tessa could also understand. But she would not accept Sousuke's proposal.

“I'm sorry. But for only this, I have to go. It may be difficult, but could you also take me down there?”

“But....”

“I won't be much trouble as much as possible. If ever you think that there is danger I will give up and turn back. So please.”

“...I understand. However I will be the one to decide if it's dangerous or not. Please quietly abide by this.”

“Yes. Thank you.”

The two of them put on their night vision goggles respectively, tying both of their bodies together, and descended into the shaft. They went down the stairs for the first few floors, but proceeding from there on, they couldn't seem to use anything except for the ladder at the inner walls of the shaft.

“On my back....”

“Yes.”

Tessa was carried on his back; the rope firmly fixated her body. With her tender breast being glued to his back he felt unsteady.

“Please take care of me, Sagara-san.”

“You sound like you are enjoying this....”

“It must be your imagination. But if you meet Kaname-san, I will keep this a secret. fufu....”

Listening to her joke, Sousuke felt something reminiscent. It was during the short time Tessa was studying at Jindai High School, it was that innocent thought. At that time, she was being ridiculed by Kaname and Mao and had always smiled that way.

Being burdened by Tessa, he climbed down the ladder.

The shaft was suitably deep. After discerning that they had descended four floors, the bottom of the shaft was still further down.

At that time, there was a ringing sound in their mobile wireless radio. It was a communication from Kurz, who was standing by outside the secret city. With the influence of the terrain and structures, there was a terrible noise.

“This is Uruz 6. There’s a terrible weather.”

“What’s the matter?”

“There are a number of helicopters approaching from the West. I can confirm three units. It’s probably the enemy.”

“Dammit. It’s too many....”



The three helicopters increased to six and Kurz cursed them inside his cockpit.

The said helicopters were flying behind the sun, and the passive sensor of the M9 had detected them late. When Kurz sighted them, the helicopters were already twelve kilometers away and approaching. And to reach the skies of the secret city, would only take about three minutes.

The second Pave Mare, in order to economize the fuel, landed on top of a small mountain forest, cutting his engine. When

they received the information from Kurz's unit in Gebo 4, the pilot of Gebo 6 started up the APU (Assisted Power Unit) and prepared to start the engine.

No, this is bad, Kurz's intuition informed him.

"Gebo 4 as well as 6, don't start your engines."

"Why, Uruz 6?"

"Those guys, they probably have ECS. That's why we were late in detecting them. They probably also have ECCS, if we took off poorly we would be discovered. Just hide in the forest like that."

If they took off then, there was a high chance that the enemy lookout helicopter would be able to detect them. The Pave Mare was not equipped with Anti aircraft weapons; they would be shoot down by the enemy attack.

"But, what do we do? We can't be bound here like this" the pilot of Gebo 4 asked. Though objecting, at the moment he had suspended the operation of the engine.

"In the mean time we hide ourselves. One they land with peace of mind there will be an opening. Then, when I commence on them, that is the time you pick up Tessa and Sousuke."

"*hn...*that's right, I understand. But how are you sure if they are the enemy of not?"

"If the locality is Russian, then we would have detected them earlier. With such extravagant equipment coming to a remote place like this-"

"It's Amalgam, dammit."

"Nowadays they're making me boil. Those lice."

The two pilots cursed. Kurz's own unit's ECS changed from Radar Infra-red concealment mode to Invisibility mode. When the M9 was transparent, the scenery across its monitors turned to violet.

The six helicopters were still approaching. He called Sousuke again.

“As you heard, Uruz 7! Hurry and come back. Hide in the deserted houses at the Northwest at Point Echo.”

“Uruz 7 roger. But it will take time.”

“Anyway just hurry.”



In the middle of the dark pit Sousuke confirmed the state of the rope and started to climb up.

“Captain. Let’s go back.”

“Wait...” Tessa said from his back, opening her mouth.

“We have to join Kurz and the others. It’s dangerous here.”

“That’s right, it can’t be helped....” she said regrettably.

It seemed that there was something important that was sleeping below the shaft.

But if they were slow, they would lose everything. The enemy infantry would be getting there soon. Sousuke could not protect Tessa alone. She knew that well, and so she didn’t say anything unreasonable.

The ladder was terribly rusted, and considerably not easy to climb quickly.

“Please hold on.”

“Yes.”

After saying that, the ladder that Sousuke was holding on to made a strange noise and fell. Right away both of his hands grabbed the hand rail, regaining his balance, but that time the base of the rail broke apart.

“Kyah....!”

Their bodies were thrown down. With the rope fixed at the mouth of the pit, they didn't fall any further; the two of them were hanging in the darkness.

"Are you hurt?"

"I'm alright. I'm sorry."

"Please don't let go."

Bracing both his legs on the surface wall, he reeled in the rope with the full strength of his body, discretely going up the shaft.

This is bad...

It would take about three minutes until they got out of the shaft. They might be surrounded by the enemy like that-



"-Landing Zone (LZ) confirmed. Shall we descend?" the pilot of the transport helicopter informed Kalinin over the com.

"Don't land yet. Wait until the search for the enemy in the surrounding area is finished."

"Roger."

The other four units and the transport helicopter that Kalinin was riding over Yamsk 11 were loosely circling. It was organized as four Mi-26 transport helicopters and two Mi-24 attack helicopters.

Although irregular, to land the six units, Kalinin had adopted the method he had used during his time in Afghanistan.

The transport helicopter loaded with AS and personnel would standby in a safe airspace at high altitude; the remaining one unit would be concealed in the distant mountains. And then the two units of Hind, with offensive and high mobility, would be patrolling the skies at 500 meters and 1500 meters.

Even if the guerrillas attacked with anti aircraft weapons, only the lowest altitude helicopter would get hit and they could immediately increase the violent attacks. Additionally, the hidden transport helicopter could be dispatched at any time and give pressure by deploying ground forces.

“The rumors of your firm methods seems to be true, Mister Kalium” Wilhelm Casper said over the wireless circuit.

He was a German sniper. Right then he was inside another transport helicopter, standing by in the Lambda Driver-equipped AS, Eligor.

“If you want to go sightseeing then do it another day. I want to quickly say goodbye to this boring place.”

“This is no sightseeing. You will sortie any moment, so stand by” Kalinin answered bluntly.

Such type of AS and airborne troops, the cooperation of attack helicopters, the regiment attached to Kalinin... that was called “Mouse Trap”. Wanting the cheese no matter what, the mouse would be caught between the metal fittings of the snapping spring. There was no way to escape.

Even the Afghanistan guerrillas known for their valor feared that technique which Kalinin had thought of.

Amalgam had customized the Russian-made heavy helicopter Mi-26 Halo and Mi-24 Hind with ECS and ECCS and loaded them with every kinds of sensor. If the opponents were the normal regular army, they could freely move about and deceive their eyes, no matter what kind of deceiving methods their opponents made they would be immediately discovered.

However, their enemy was not the expected regular army. It was them.

At the moment there were no signs of the enemy. The elaborate search for the enemy before landing was not overkill, no matter how many times it was done.

Then the voice of Leonard Testarossa sounded in the wireless circuit. He was riding with Chidori Kaname and the French spy in another Halo.

"I respect your prudence, Mister Kalium. I'm also in agreement with Mr. Casper's opinion. It would be better to land quickly."

"Can you tell me the reason?"

"That's right.... but the reaction is about to appear."

Leonard's voice was full of mischief. Kalinin felt that he had heard that voice before. When was that? No, it was not from the past. On the contrary-

"--Mr. Casper's opinion. It would be better to land quickly."

"Can you tell me--"

Just now. There was a bizarre déjà vu, repeating the same words, he was replying to me.

"See. This town is special. The effects of the experiments still remain; if you were careless the feeling of time will be ambiguous. The passengers would be alright, but it would be trouble for the pilots."

At that time, the Hind that was flying in a low-altitude slope and almost crashed into the chemical plant. The helicopter barely picked up its altitude, and made a sudden rise with maximum output.

The belly of the unit grazed the summit of the big silo rising from the plant; in the twilight large sparks were scattered.

"That condition" Leonard made a tedious voice.

The pilots of the Hind were surprised.

"Idiot, you're gonna get hit!?"

“No, I’m sure I turned to the left. But then the unit was in the former position....”

“What are you talking about? You were in the same position as before—”

It seems that they were not aware of the nature of the déjà vu. Kalinin ordered the Hind to fly away above the plant and investigate the location where the transport helicopter would be landing. It would be better in a place outside the town. It seemed that it would be dangerous near the plant-

With that Casper communicated.

“The mountainous district three kilometers Northeast, can you see the terrace halfway up the mountain? Rocket missile or whatever. Attack the area of that mountain.”

“It’s possible, but why?”

“Just shoot and you’ll know” Casper answered with an obstinate hard laughter.

Kalinin no longer asked and ordered the pilot of the helicopter to do it.



Right then, Sousuke, who was not yet away from the plant, was telling them of the helicopter’s state in the air. Then the sharp alarm inside the cockpit of the M9 sounded.

<Warning. 2 o’clock. Unguided Rockets (UGR). Multiple. Impact in 3, 2....>

“Wha...”

In an instant, Kurz thought about barely evading them. At that distance they would not hit-- that he judged.

Impact.

One shot was 30 meters from the M9. It hit the bare rock and then spread with a thunderous sound. The remaining shots exploded at more distant locations.

“.....”

The flying earth and sand rained down on the M9, hitting the armor with a dry sound. Kurz’s unit didn’t stir from the shooting position. He saw the situation of the enemy through the smoke.

“Were you discovered?” Sousuke said from the wireless radio.

The two units of allied helicopters were still hiding in the mountain forest.

“No-”

There were no follow up attacks. He had not yet been seen by the enemy. That was just a test shot. Seeing the place he was hiding as stinky they had randomly fired the rocket. If he stayed there, they might let it go--

No, he couldn’t.

“I’ll be spotted somehow, before that I’m going commence on them. Gebo 4, 6. Prepare for takeoff!”

If it were an ordinary enemy, it would be unimaginable that an AS would be hiding in that mountain. With them attacking like that, they were no ordinary opponents. Then it would be useless to hide. Also the debris that landed on the shape of the M9, with the operational invisibility mode of the ECS it would be an unnatural sight for the naked eye. Anyhow, it would only be a matter of time before they were found out.

Master Mode On.

The precision alignment sensor of the 76mm Sniper cannon made a small roar. Distant Anti-aircraft mode. Atmospheric

Temperature, humidity, wind speed data streaming, the ballistic calculation units were trembling with the numerical values.

“Uruz 6, it’s about the formation of the enemy’s helicopters—” Sousuke said, still climbing from inside the shaft. The noise was getting worst.

“Later.”

“Listen. It was a harsh method of the Russian Military of the Afghan. The leader of the enemy is Lt. Commander Kalinin.”

“Damn. That old man...”

He selected the target. Priority was on the target with the highest threat.

First would be the Hind.

The enemy units circled in the air. He pointed on the target box of M (Mike) 3.

He calculated the distance and velocity of the helicopter. [VALID AIM] was indicated on the screen.

You’re kidding. Those calculations are different.

The angle was difficult. The effects of the down current produced by the helicopter were corrected by intuition.

Up 2 millimeters. Left one millimeter.

That’s right, here it comes--

Discharge.

The flame of the shot turned the screen white. The 76mm shell with the super speed of sound would take some time before it hit the target. Roughly around three seconds.

Hit.

Taking in the high caliber shell, the enemy Hind was in pieces in an instant. The rotor rushing away, the unit was squashed- there was an explosion.

“Next...!”

The fragments of the enemy unit fell; there was no time to observe. Immediately the next shell was loaded and aimed at the other Hind.

That time it was a high altitude short distance. He corrected the ballistics.

Aim, fire- hit.

The tail of the attack helicopter was blown away. Without the torque control the unit went out of order, rotating. Going down from that altitude it fell on one part of the chemical plant. Two attack helicopters down. Now the allied helicopters could get away.

“Next...!”

The enemy had already accurately got hold of his position. He could bury one more unit, but the remaining three units would be hard to aim at.

One unit was already in between the secret city and was hiding in the hills beyond. The other units were currently diving from a high altitude. Far and fast. They couldn't be aimed at. Another unit was flying at a low altitude, trying to hide in part of the plant. If he were to aim then, that would be it.

The nose diving helicopter had already disappeared on the ground, throwing an AS out from its opened hatch. Red armor. A developed Codarl type. It could be seen carrying a long sniper cannon. That red AS-

He could feel his heart palpitate.

Would he shoot it immediately after landing? No, it was useless. For an opponent equipped with a Lambda Driver that expected an attack from that direction, ordinary attacks would not be effective. But there were no more seconds left, there was certainty that he would shoot at Kurz.

Kurz made a prompt decision, and aimed at the transport helicopter hiding in the plant cluster.

The large helicopter Halo flew into the side of the silo and water tank, pylon intertwined with various pipes. Estimating the location, he aligned. He aimed carefully, but there was no time.

He fired. The shell in flight could be seen piercing the silo, but whether it hit the target or not was unknown.

A flaming discharge came from the ruins. Incoming.

The unit turned and made a jack knife maneuver. Carrying a rifle with a posture of looking up, with the strength of the back it made a short jump. In the area where the M9 was, the enemy's shell pierced with a violent cloud of dust scattering.

"Tsk...!"

Controlling the posture he landed on two feet. There was an unforgiving successive shot from the enemy. He stooped his body and barely evaded. It was an absurdly accurate shot. Even with a custom firing control computer, at that distance, the impact point should have been a blur.

The possibility of shooting that far was not the ability of the unit. It was the technique of a human who had mastered the utmost limits of firing, experience, and intuition.

There was no mistake. It was 'Him'.

"Damn Casper."



Kaname was looking at Lemon in the cabin of the transport helicopter. Suddenly there was a sound of an explosion from far away. She looked outside from the portside window. The attack helicopter that had been circling the ruins just then was scattered to pieces.

"Explosion....? Ah...!"

The unit shook and she was thrown out of the bed. She somehow clung on to the seat with all her might. Lemon's body was fixed in the stretcher and seemed to be alright.

They were not crashing. With the warning from the enemy attack, the helicopter made a nose dive. The ruins that had looked small below gradually drew close.

"Snipe from enemy AS! We're going to use the North side of the plant as a shield and hide!" the helicopter's pilot shouted from the in-flight communications.

"Don't. Don't go near the plant. Get to a higher altitude" Leonard told the pilot from the cargo room. It was a calm voice.

"But, we will get hit like this! One unit is already down! From that distance- he's an unbelievably skillful guy!"

"Go up to a higher altitude. If you do so you will surely be safe," Leonard asserted.

"Why are you so definite!? I can't, I'm hiding!"

The helicopter turned. Soon the giant pylons of the plant were within reach. They were hiding from the enemy's line of sight.

"Fasten your belt, Kaname-san" a bedridden Lemon said with a pale face.

"I'm telling you this for your sake. If you go down from a high altitude it would in turn be dangerous—"

There was an impact, strange noises, and a flash from outside the window. The unit jerked in a slope. The warped parts echoed with a terrible sound inside of the unit.

What was happening, she did not know clearly. Did the enemy beyond the building shield shoot? Was this noise the sound of the drive shaft's tail Rotor being heavily damage?

The pilot screamed from the in-flight communications.

“But, we will get hit like this! One unit is already down!
From that distance—”

She didn’t know the meaning of it. The same words from before were repeated. The unit randomly shook, skidding in the skies of the plant at high speed then diving downward.

The pilot and co-pilot shouted.

“What’s happening, suddenly at this altitude—”

“I can’t, I’m hiding!.... no, what was that? Why is the damage...”

“Pull the stick, you idiot!”

“Help! I don’t understand. I should have sustained a serious injury.”

“What are you talking about!?”

“Why are we still flying? We should have already crashed.”

It was the voice of fear. The unit shook. The plant drew close. Like an elliptically intertwined iron plant. Floating in the middle of darkness was a ghastly form, steadily becoming bigger.

What did the rotor come in contact with?

The metal overhead tore apart; the atmosphere was messily torn up. It was like the screams of a ghost. Terrible impact made them swoop many times, bit by bit. The illumination in the cabin created by the sparks disappeared. There was total darkness. Her body drifted, pushing on the seat, and drifted again. The headset was plucked off from the head. She heard Lemon’s screams of pain.

The helicopter was swallowed up by the structures of the plant, steadily falling downward. That at least they somehow knew. How far were they going to drop? Inside the ruins, there might be no bottom-- that was what Kaname thought.



“—s is Uruz 6! Engaging enemy AS—”

Kurz was reporting the situation through the wireless radio. Time to listen to the subject was something Sousuke certainly didn't have. They were still in the middle of climbing the pit, when suddenly a giant helicopter was falling over their heads.

“Wha....”

The helicopter emitted small sparks, furthermore in the mouth of the pit—it was slowly falling from the huge stairwell. The unit was entangled with the warped pipes and steel frames of the plant.

The pipes were close to rope that the helicopter was hanging from. Losing to the weight of the helicopter, the structure was falling apart piece by piece.

It would fall into the pit— 10 seconds or 20 seconds. There was no time to hesitate.

“We getting down, Grab on!”

Informing Tessa, Sousuke fixed the reserved rope on the nearby metal frame with the carabiner, and kicked the wall.

It was no longer possible to ascend and get away. Using the rope he tried to drop down to the bottom of the pit since there was no other place to find shelter in the pit.

They fell two floors in one kick. Then another kick. He wanted to descend faster, but with the weight of two people it would be overdoing it.

There was a roaring sound overhead. The helicopter hit the opening of the pit. It was barely hanging on; it would sink down on them next.

The fragments of the unit and the plant were raining in pieces, grazing Sousuke's side. It was a black shadow in the night vision scope. A pillow-sized metal fragment was drawing close. Bracing both legs on the surface wall he faced up, covering Tessa

on his back. The metal fragment hit his left arm that was covering his head.

“Ku....!”

Staggering from catching the fragment, he forcibly pulled back and descended. He kicked the wall two to three times. Tessa was shrieking wildly.

They weren't yet on the ground. Looking down it was still three floors. They came near to a rounded floor.

Finally, the helicopter fell. There were countless sparks scattering in the whole of the pit. The pit was like a large gun barrel. The wreckage of that helicopter was like an elliptical shell being pushed out of the gun barrel.

Another kick. Suddenly they lost the support of the rope in midair. The metal frame that the rope was attached to broke off.

“!”

“Kyah...”

With Tessa being carried on his back, Sousuke fell from the height of the floor. He somehow turned his body. In a manner to avoid crushing Tessa, half of his right side hit the floor. The air leaked out of his lungs, and his head was dizzy. He ignored the pain. Removing the rope he raised his body. The helicopter was drawing nearer. He no longer had time to look up. Carrying Tessa in his back, he ran off into a passage that entered his field of vision. The helicopter drew close. Just a little more. Another four steps---- three steps----

“Fu....!!”

He jumped forward. The metal sound and squall beat into his ears.

Turning his head he saw that, just behind him, the wreckage of the helicopter had plugged the entrance of the passage.

They had somehow survived.

But it was still too early to feel relieved. Sousuke immediately stood up from lying face down and continued to walk forward in the dark passage. There was a smell of jet fuel. If the helicopter exploded in a confined space like that, the two of them would be barbecued. They needed to get away as far as possible.

“Tessa!?”

There was no reply. It seemed she had fainted. In the mean time there was still the sensation of breathing. Her body, which was supposed to be fixated by the rope to his body, was slowly slipping off his back. Although he wanted to support her, he could not do so with his numb left arm that had been hit with a metal fragment moments ago. Without strength, she tumbled down, lying down on the ground.

At that time there was a big jolt in the passage. The ground slanted and the floor in front of them fell down. It was a deep hole.

The underground facility was still further down. Had the shock from the crash made the surrounding structures brittle? While extending his hand to Tessa, who had collapsed on the floor, the ground of the passage suddenly fell to pieces.

“!”

He tried to grab at something at once but his injured left hand failed to do so. Being swallowed by the rusted iron panel, he fell into the dark hole.



The crash was finally over. And she was still alive.

“Hn...”

In the middle of the darkness, Kaname let out a groan.

The seatbelt was eating into the pain of her shoulder and lower back. The seat that she was strapped into was dangling off the floor.

The irritating smell of jet fuel reached her nose. The turbo shaft engine was still making a thundering sound. She had to get out of that place fast.

“Somebody? Are you alive!”

“Somehow.”

From the side Lemon’s voice could be heard. Kaname removed the seatbelt, carefully avoiding falling down from the vertical floor. She groped around, looking for Lemon’s body. She grabbed something randomly and he let out a strange shriek.

“Hyah!?”

“Ah, sorry.Hyah!?”

When she understood what she was gripping, she let out a strange shriek, rubbing the palms of her hands in her clothes.

“That was such an awful reaction...”

“Anyway, we have to get out of here.”

Kaname loosened the belt that was holding Lemon’s body on the stretcher.

“I agree, but I don’t know if I can walk.”

“Walk! You don’t want to die right!?”

Loosening the restraining belt, she supported Lemon. The wound hurt, but he bore the pain and groaned. Relying only on memory they searched the side of the seats, there was an emergency pocket light. They lit it. The situation of their surrounding was reflected into their eyes. It seemed that they fell down in a nose dive. Stopping short of the cabin, the control room ahead was smashed.

“The hatch....”

“Over there. Can you go?”

“Let’s try.”

They saw the hatch beside the barrier wall that separated the cabin and control room. It had been distorted from the impact of the crash and was out of place. Using the 90 degree seat as a scaffold, Kaname alighted to the side of the hatch. Lemon, taking care of his injured leg, somehow managed to continue after.

Alighting first, Kaname kicked the hatch. The door only creaked, and did not open. She tried again with all of her might. Even though her knees were hurt and numb from the kicking, it would not open.

“Kaname-san, it’s useless. Let’s find another way out.”

Ignoring the advice of Lemon, she removed the fire extinguisher that she noticed from the barrier wall. Surprised at its weight, she brandished it and hit the hatch. It still would not open. But she felt a reaction. Well, one more time!

“It’s useless. Another place would....”

“Yuuuuuuuu!”

Thinking of the faces of the people she hated, she beat on the wall. While she was letting it have it, there was a sound of metal bending. The hatch vigorously opened on the other side. It was a crack that would allow one person to pass through.

“Alright, let’s get out of here!”

“I’m astonished.”

They could see the outside from the exit. The irritating odor of the fuel hurt their eyes. It would not be strange if an explosion occurred. There was a concrete wall in front of them. The illumination of the light showed that the ground below was around two meters away. They could somehow descend.

“Well let’s go.”

When Lemon said that, there was a faint groan from behind them. Looking from the opposite side of the hatch-- there was a

man collapsed in the corner of the cabin. It was one of the soldiers that had been looking out for Kaname. Although he was injured, he was still alive.

“Let’s go, Kaname-san.”

“But....”

“They’re the enemy! Come on!”

“I can’t after all. Go down first.”

“Ah....”

Pushing Lemon outside the helicopter, Kaname hurriedly rushed over to the man.

“Can you move? Let’s get out of here!”

“Uh...”

The man looked half conscious, and could not reply. His leg seemed to be fractured, it would be impossible to stand up.

“This may hurt but please bear it!”

Kaname grabbed the nape of the man’s neck with both hands, and started to forcibly pull him into the hatch.

He was outrageously heavy. Gathering all the strength from her body, she walked back with a waddle. She was immediately breathing heavily but she kept pulling regardless.

“Funu....nuoooooooo...!”

The man was moved to the exit, grasping for air in pain. She pushed him out from the crack in the hatch.

“Hurry!”

Lemon, already down in the ground, beckoned. The upper body of the man casually fell out of the unit, with his lower body hanging up--

“Uwah....!”

The man fell and dragged Lemon into the ground. Then Kaname went out of the unit, using the protrusion of the unit as a scaffold.

“Let’s go!”

Together with Lemon, who was dragging his leg, she supported the man’s shoulder. They progressed away from the unit through a crack in the wall. They could see a large tunnel opened up from the wall. It was a size that a truck could go through.

“What’s this tunnel?”

“In any case this way!”

They dove into the tunnel, staggering. Because of the crash’s impact everything was collapsing.

A panel was hanging from the ceiling, particularly with a creaking sound. After Kaname and the others had proceeded about ten odd meters in the tunnel there were flames from behind them.

“My leg is hurt....I can’t walk anymore.”

“You can’t! Do your best!”

There was conflagration coming from the wreckage of the helicopter.

There was an old worn out truck in one corner of the tunnel. The rusted tires had disappeared from the corrosion. With the last ounce of Kaname’s strength, she pulled Lemon and the man, running for cover in that truck.

If we came this far, will we be alright for the mean time?

Following that thought there was an explosion.

The heat wave and shockwave reached their distance. Flooding fragments jumped about inside the tunnel. The aluminum alloy turned to a sharp knife and pierced the wreckage of the truck. The heat of surrounding atmosphere scorched Kaname and the others like a sauna.

“.....!!”

Kaname squatted, holding her breath. There was an alarm in her heart, and she could feel the sweat on her back.

It was probably around ten seconds that she stared blankly.

She timidly opened her eyes. She was gasping. There must not be enough oxygen?

It was hard to breath. But at first it was only a few moments. There seemed to be fresh air flowing from somewhere. So as not to inhale the smoke, she crawled up and down.

“Mr. Lemon, are you alright?”

“Somehow” Lemon answered with a weak voice. “But, how do you say this.... I think I know why Sousuke fell for you.”

“Why?”

“An impressive strength. I’m impressed.... haha”

With regards to consciousness, Kaname now recalled her own behavior. She didn’t remember doing something that strange-

“....speaking of which, it’s been a long time, something like this.”

“Huh?”

“This kind of action. It was very inconvenient when I was with him.”

Spitting on the ground, she stood up by herself.



Leonard’s Belial was suspended in mid air. He was simply observing the escaping helicopter descend into the underground of the plant.

He could have prevented the crash. He could have immediately pulled up the descending helicopter. And then, he could have torn up the cabin and only grabbed Chidori Kaname.

However, he did not execute any of that.

He observed the wreckage of the helicopter which fell to the bottom the large elevator shaft with a high resolution infra red sensor. He looked on as the girl and the Frenchman got out of the

hatch, escaping inside into the underground facility. It was such a touching matter, lending her shoulder to a wounded soldier who she had no sense of duty to save.

Later the helicopter exploded, firstly she was alright. Leonard had also confirmed that. That's right-- she had to be alright.

"The sniping M9 seems to have withdrawn." Wilhelm Casper reported after engaging the enemy.

The improved Codarl type AS, Eligor, descended.

"I searched for traces of his Transport Pave Mare but, they also got away. I'll stand guard."

"Roger. We are currently landing the infantry. We will secure the town" Kalinin replied.

"Then I'll leave that to you gentlemen. I will go down" Leonard said.

"To the underground facility? Alone?"

"Aah. I'm going to explore. Chidori Kaname and the Frenchman escaped and got away underground."

"We will be sending soldiers from here, will that be alright?"

"As you wish" replying simply, he cut off the communication.

Leonard's unit ascended, comparing the collected data and the actual landscape. He scrutinized the relations of the underground facility in his head. And then he descended, entering the large elevator shaft in the central plant.

At the bottom of the giant pit the helicopter was still burning. Burning like a furnace of death.

The Belial approached the wreckage in flames. The flames and smoke avoided the unit. And then he drew nearer. With an unseen force the atmosphere was pushed back, crushing the

burning wreckage. The conflagration twinkled like a mirror. Heat, smoke, flame, and the pieces of metal— all of it opened up from Leonard's path.

The legs of the Belial touched the bottom of the shaft. It was a silent landing.

“Well then....”

Kneeling the unit, he opened the cockpit hatch.



They stayed at a distance barely in range of Tessa and Sousuke's mobile radio. They were standing by roughly ten kilometers east of the mountain ranges. Kurz and the crew of the Pave Mare were discussing things. After finishing the camouflage, and scattering disposable vibration sensors, the threat of the red AS was currently not urgent.

“....well, how about contact with Sousuke?”

Getting off from the dust stained M9, Kurz walked to the Pave Mare that was parked in the middle of the woods. He listened to the pilot coming out from the rear hatch. Gebo 4's pilot was an Italian called Salvio.

“We can't. We don't know if they're alright or not. We can't call them on the frequency, even if it's an encrypted communication the enemy would perceive our location.”

“How about the *de Danaan*?”

“Even if we explain the situation, they're on the other side of the world. They won't be able to send reinforcements immediately; Mao and Clouseau have their hands full and can't leave.”

“Dammit, this is the worst.”

“Anyway we can still get away; it's still not the worst.”

Another pilot of the unit Gebo 6, an American Second Lieutenant named Fisher, bumped in and handed a bottle of Mineral water to Kurz. Casually receiving it he took off his headset and poured the water on his head. Even though they were in an unpleasantly cold climate, it couldn't be helped as his face was hot.

"The enemy doesn't know that we are leaving the two of them behind. At any rate, with such messy ruins like that, if Sousuke managed to hide, I don't think they would be easily found. The Captain also said that they would 'need a few hours to finish'. If they are also safe, we can wait here for the whole night, right?"

"It's impossible" Kurz denied, and drank the remaining water in the bottle.

Even though Salvio and Fisher were Second Lieutenants, they did not mind the conscious attitude particularly in rank difference from Kurz who was a Master Sergeant. Their ages were not far apart, and they had had a relationship for nearly two years being together in drop operations, and above all, for the current Mithril, rank was only for conveniences. In a difficult situation like that, Salvio respected the judgment of Kurz, who was accustomed to actual combat.

"....Puha. The enemy had already noticed that Tessa and Sousuke were dropped off into the ruins. Because that was a stormy town, there are still bound to be traces of footsteps to take notice of. A single soldier with good training, a slow moving woman, it could be read that they have entered the plant."

"They understood that much?"

"The enemy is the Lieutenant Commander."

Even then, for the people of the *de Danaan*, they still called Kalinin "Lieutenant Commander". It was not that they yearned for any lingering attachment; they just couldn't change the habit.

“Also.... aside from the Lieutenant Commander, that guy is among the enemy”

“That guy? Who would that be?”

“My teacher” Kurz said annoyingly. “Do you know the name Wilhelm Casper?”

“Aah...I think I’ve somehow heard it. I’ve read his name countless times in a special magazine..... He was a German.”

“That’s right. His family was Snipers for generations. His Grandfather killed a lot of alliance soldier in the Second World War; he was an incredible Knights Cross guy. His father was said to be feared in Indochina and Africa. But that Wilhelm— he killed over 100 people in the Russian Civil war, Lebanon and Tajikistan. A former East German soldier, he became a mercenary after the unification.”

“Is he a master?”

“Not that kind of Level. He’s a Devil.do you know the world record for an actual combat snipe? It’s 2500 meters. It was achieved by a sergeant in the American Marines. The target was a commissioned officer of the Iraqi Army. Using a 50 caliber (12.7mm) penetrating rifle and the latest Ballistic Predicting equipment, in relatively calm conditions.”

“The Olympics world is really astonishing”

“I’m not saying that this is a bad skill, or this was due to the equipments, and it hit after a number of shots. On the other hand the record of Casper is 1520 meters. It’s short by 1000 meters from the ‘world record’. However, his weapon was a 308 caliber (7.6mm) wooden rifle. At night, raining, with a condition of the wind speed blowing 15 meters directly horizontal. And it was only one shot.”

“Um.... is that really hard?”

“It was quite far. Compared to a 50 caliber shell, the 308 caliber is quite light, and the energy is smaller. In addition it was in bad weather. The parabola of the ballistics was complex. It was a risky hole in one in the middle of the storm. For a person in the same profession they would laugh and not believe it.”

With a dark voice Kurz continued, “But I saw it. At that time, I was beside him as a supporter.”

In the back of his mind the scene of that night was revived.



It was a desolate street. The conflagration had caused it to be mostly abandoned. The night sky was stained blood red. It was damp and humid with rain. Roadside trees were swayed by the wind. From far away echoed the roars of cannons from the Israel Army.

There was a room in a partially destroyed western style house. From the wide hole in the wall, he was aiming at the target. 1520 meters.

From a western house erected on a hill with a good view to the target, who was visiting a local hotel—that was the distance from the entrance.

The target was a manager of a military organization. The meeting would soon be over and he would come out of the hotel. The delay for him to disappear into the bullet proof limousine waiting in front was merely five seconds.

1520 meters.

For someone who was a marksman as an occupation, that condition and that distance would be an extremity in space. It was a world that had nothing to do with him. An area where no hands could reach.

How stupid. He can't shoot it. That was what Kurz thought. He was jeering him with odious words and kept saying they should return to camp and have a drink.

He did not reply. Kurz's words really did not enter his ears.

Lying down on the floor wet by the rain in a sheltered altitude, it was like his body was welded to his gun. The scope connected to his right eye. He had very quite breathing. With the Mediterranean Sea that close the night was getting colder and the humidity higher. There remained an awful impression from his visible breath.

There was movement inside the lobby. Sensing that the target was coming out, Kurz informed him.

"The stag is coming."

In his unit, that was what they always call the target. Although he heard, he did not answer. If he answered his chin would move. If his chin moved, his accuracy will be out of order.

The door of the hotel opened. The roadside trees were swaying. The bodyguards were coming out. Of course they did not take notice of their location. Straightening his thin collar, the "Stag" showed his appearance. An unshaven man over 50.

The target walked towards the waiting car.

It should not have hit— At that time, that was what Kurz thought.

He shot.

The instant that he pulled the trigger, it was hard to express words. It was no exaggeration, the space around him distorted, a discernment like it was being drawn to the limit. At least that was how Kurz felt. The utmost limits of concentration and the utmost limits of his sensation from a while ago had summoned something that could not be seen.

That was what they called a "ghost coming".

By no means was it an entreaty to a deity. All the devices—eyes, brains, finger, trigger, firing pin, cartridge, barrel, rifling, muzzle, and then the bullet, conformed to the laws of physics. There was no room for intervention from God or Ghosts.

From thousands of bullets that were shot, in each record, learning, mixing one's own gunpowder, manufacturing a cartridge, cutting off warheads, all kinds of weather condition and distances, in every angle, failure, failure, and layers of failure, calculations, starting over, calculating. That was the technical skill that was grasped from its end.

Whether mysterious or not, he really had no faith. Everything was mechanically moved, the bullet flew to the calculated position.

However, at that time something certainly came.

There was nothing to be said but a “ghost coming”.

At that moment, the ghost came. There was an indication of something descending. Next, the tip of the weapon made a dazzling radiance, and then a gunshot reached his ears.

It was 1520 meters. He had not heard of it ever succeeding.

But it hit— *he felt the ghost*, Kurz gradually thought.

The bullet that flew in the middle of the rain and wind, of course could not be seen. But two seconds after the shot the head of the target could be seen spraying blood. The blood danced in the middle of the rain.

The surprised bodyguards shouted at something. The body of the headless target was pushed to the seat by two people, running away from that place.

“Let's go.”

He struck at the shoulder of a dumbfounded Kurz. He didn't show any signs of being satisfied of his accomplishment or any boastful behaviors of his skills. Both of them left the western

house and withdrew. While walking in the rain, Kurz excitedly praised his skills.

“Don’t think you can imitate this, boy” Wilhelm Casper said, standing to a halt and turning his head with sympathizing eyes. “You can’t do it.”

In fact, from then on, Kurz was not able to imitate it even once.

One week after that, a decisive incident occurred. Kurz, with young emotions, left Casper’s unit.



“It was 4 years ago in Lebanon.”

He did not tell the details to the pilots. For a number of seconds, Kurz remembered secretly the events of that time.

“I can’t do a shot like that. Whether it was experience of sense---- that’s not the dimension. But something more definite, something he has that I don’t.”

“Is it will, resolution, or something like that?” Salvio asked.

“I wonder. I really don’t understand.well, if it’s character, then I have it. At any rate, the first time that I touched a rifle, was about five or six years ago.”

“That’s the first I’ve heard of it.”

“It’s not like I was hiding it. In the first year I got mixed as a volunteer soldier in the Middle East, from there I was picked up by those guys— Casper unit. That’s what I remember.”

“Hee. What kind of unit was it?”

“It has no name. Just ‘Casper’s unit’. Fighting all over the world, it was a group of sharpshooters, well..... you might say it was the modern version of Bailey’s South African Sharpshooter.”

“What’s that? Baileys....?”

“It’s from the past, a mercenary unit. But never mind that. The problem is— I probably can’t win against him.”

Of course speaking in terms of tactics, it was not a simple competition of target practice.

If the aiming distance was shorter than the enemy by 100 meters, it would be simple to move 100 meters forward. With other things like camouflage, diversionary tactics, deception, pincer movements, and combining other methods, the chance of surely defeating the enemy would come out. That was tactics. To include all of it, he was saying that Kurz could not win against Casper.

“But, we will be leaving Tessa and Sousuke behind. We can’t just abandon them.”

“That’s right....”

Kurz made a sigh, and remained in thought. When his comrades were in anxiety, he made an unpleasant sigh.

“Well, one way or another. Anyway, we wait for a chance.”

“Chance, what kind?”

“We pick up the two’s communication, we can still escape. Making diversionary tactics we support them in full force.”

Standing up, he returned backed to his own M9.

Something clanged on the back of his cockpit hatch. Opening a small shock proof firearms container, he took out a rigorously wrapped rifle from inside. Getting back to the ground, he opened the package; the rifle displayed a sullen scene.

After the prelude in AS battle, he thought that there might come a time that it would be its turn.

It was a bolt action rifle that let out a gloomy brilliance.

It was ancient and simple, but that was why it was a beautiful work of art. The wooden part was made of brown walnut lumber. The bulky gun barrel was dark blue. The white granular pattern emerged from the myriad of Teflon treatments. He had

installed a 36 fold scope on its top part, its length was like it was another gun, thick.

That weapon was manufactured 50 years ago in the Winchester plant; it prided itself on having an unattainable precision compared to the latest sniping weapons. The possessors of it so far, there was no mistake that they had poured their affection into its elaborate maintenance. It could be said it was an excellent gun that was the “rifle among rifles”. It has been five years since he had grasped that gun as a greenhorn. It was something that has been passed on to him. That kind of gun was suitable for that man.

1520 meters.

If it was that weapon then that may be realized.



The man that Kaname saved through her bravery was still bearing serious injuries.

“Fracture in the right arm, lacerations in the right flank. And there seems to be a hit on the back of the head- but we still don’t know how serious this is” Lemon said, roughly inspecting the injuries.

That casualty was a dark man in his 30’s. He was not really largely built but he had tightened muscles. If he were to be fine, Kaname and Lemon would surely be captured.

“Can he be saved?”

“I wonder about that. If we can properly treat him immediately, he can somehow manage.... Unfortunately we have not first-aid set. It is certain that we cannot move him.”

“Is that so...”

The man with a faint appearance groaned. He seemed to be conscious for the time being.

“Hang on. What’s your name?”

“...Brown”

“Mr. Brown. The helicopter went down and there was an explosion, but we managed to save you. Unfortunately, I think the others have died. We want to treat you, but we don’t have the tools or medicine here. Do you understand this much?”

The man groaned weakly, moving his lips with an “*I understand*”.

“I think your friends will be coming here soon. They know where we are right? That’s why, we’re sorry, but we have to leave you behind and run away.”

“Don’t....go....”

He was helpless from being injured. The man sluggishly put up his left hand, and grabbed her arm. When she was unable to grant the wish of the man, Kaname somehow felt guilty, even though he was a subordinate of the enemy.

Gently grabbing the hand of the man, she wiped a handkerchief in the man’s face.

“I’m sorry. Here, put this on. It will keep you warm. Do your best.”

Taking off her red down jacket, Kaname put it on top of the man.

“Lemon-san, can you walk? I’ll lend you my shoulder.”

“Aah, I’ll somehow do my best.....ouch.”

“Let’s go.”

Leaving the injured man behind, the two of them walked out of the place, staggering.

Proceeding to the passage, it was a dead end. The collapsed ceiling that had deteriorated over the years was blocking the

passage. After retracing their steps, they headed towards another passage through a branch.

“Are you cold?”

“I’m alright. How about you, lending your jacket to a guy like him...”

“Are you saying that I’m a hypocrite?”

Being offended, Lemon denied in haste.

“That’s not it. It’s just.... you really don’t understand. Since you are clever, you should have already noticed it. You did something dangerous.”

“What do you mean?”

“That Brown guy, leaving him alive in an open place, it’s telling his friends that we’re alive and running away. If that’s so, even if we ran away we can’t get away. We could have let them think that we were burned together with the rest of the crew.”

“Ah.”

Kaname unexpectedly stopped.

“Huh?”

“I..it’s nothing. Anyway, let’s hurry”

“....could it be that you didn’t notice? You did that without thinking?”

It hit the spot. Kaname really didn’t think that far. Before thinking, that sort of thing had already come up.

“Is that so? You didn’t think about it.”

“Y..you’re mistaken! I thought of it carefully, but it guess I really can’t abandon him!”

“Hm.... Well, that’s how it is.”

“What’s that? In the first place if you were aware of it, why didn’t you say something!?”

“See, I thought so.”

“Uuh....”

Lemon laughed. While being embarrassed, Kaname sensed another emotion. Being a Whispered, her intelligence would abruptly surface. Increasing the different knowledge, she was becoming a remarkably intelligent person-

Uo, amazing. I was greatly stupefied.

But what is this, this feeling of relief?

I am me. I also make blunders. But saving people... I still haven't changed—

But those feelings... where did Lemon's next words go?

"It's not that. It's just....You really don't understand. Since you are clever, you should have already noticed it. You did something dangerous....huh? No, being a hypocrite...eh?"

"What are you talking about?"

In a standstill, Lemon pushed his brows with his fingers and made a short groan. The awful mood seemed to have gotten worse.

Even Kaname was seized with a strange sensation. Lemon being confused like this, how many times did she see it? No, wasn't that the first time? Aah, that was-

"Déjà vu" she muttered.

It was not another first. She had experienced it a number of times. Also, déjà vu was a phenomenon was also present for an ordinary person. Although she was used to it, since coming to the ruins the frequency of déjà vu seemed to be very high. More accurately the frequency was uncountable, the ruins were strange after all.

Exactly what is in these ruins?

It might be something related to the Omni Sphere. No, there seemed to be no mistake. The déjà vu phenomenon was the strengthened effect of the Omni Sphere. In ordinary living things the reverberation was harmless, even an ordinary person like

Lemon could feel it. Even the pilot of that helicopter, just before crash landing, had said something weird. That too.

Was there another Whispered nearby? Aside from Leonard and herself? Leonard was inside the cargo riding the AS, Belial, when the helicopter crashed. He shouldn't be dead from the crash. He was somewhere inside the ruins.

The Whispered from somewhere was using an amplification device similar to the TAROS, the Reverberation or some sort of electromagnetic disturbance effect must have been created by that. No-

That's not it.

It was something more dangerous. There.

The déjà vu had a different sensation. Every time a crisis happened, there was a feeling of someone else in her head, whispering.

“Kaname-san....?”

Lemon's voice brought her back.

“....ah, sorry. Anyway are you alright?”

“Eh?”

Noticing, the man they saved from the helicopter was lying in front of them. Kaname and the others were on the back of the truck's wreckage that they took shelter on.

Looking at his injuries Lemon said, “Fracture in the right arm, lacerations in the right flank. And there seems to be a hit on the back of the head- but we still don't know how serious this is.”

“Can he be saved?”

Aah, enough- expelling such memories from the corner of her consciousness, she asked Lemon.

“I wonder about that. If we can properly treat him immediately-”

Listening to his explanation, she explained this to Brown, wiping his face, covering him with the down jacket, lending her hands to Lemon and leaving that place. Her indiscretion being pointed out by Lemon, she seriously denied it, he smiled.

“Lemon-san.”

“What is it?”

“The déjà vu will come a number of times, so please hold on to your thoughts. Probably, the cause is somewhere in this facility.”

“...Aah. I understand” Lemon said shaking his head.

“You seem to have good understanding. Don’t you want to hear ‘why?’?”

“Following the purpose as to why these ruins were created, well, I know a little. Anyhow me and Wraith investigated it.”

Moving together with Wraith and being capture by Leonard, it was mentioned when they were inside the plane. Wraith escaped, after that he didn’t know what came next. But he did not tell her what they were investigating in Moscow. It was because there was an observer.

“About this facility?”

“It was a request from the young woman, Testarossa. She had already conjectured the existence of such secret city, but she didn’t know the location. This was constructed during the 70’s, an absolutely secret research facility. They were doing suspicious experiments on Telepathy or Future prediction. We got the results from our investigation in Moscow. The exaggeratedly excellent scientist named Professor Valov created this, in addition this research facility was seriously a national project.”

“Professor Valov....”

“I was half convinced, but I gradually believed. At any rate Amalgam seriously captured and interrogated me, and came to this

secret city. And then- as you've said we're being attacked with a strange déjà vu. Of course we don't know how much, but this seems to be a bad place.

"Even the crash just now, I don't think the cause was from an attack by someone. The pilot must have been confused."

"Aah. Even then, someone attacked.... they even tried to kill us..."

Kaname remembered the subject of communication. "Sniped". "Unbelievable skill". And then about the enemy that fought against Amalgam.

Could it be the one who attacked was Kurz Weber?

It seemed that he didn't know that Kaname was riding that helicopter. If Kurz and the others were close by, there were prospects of escape from there.

Not only that. It may be possible, that Sousuke was somewhere-

"Anyway let's find the exit."

"This research facility is interesting but.... we don't have the luxury for it."

"That's how it is."

The two of them proceeded down the dark passage. To the right. To the left. When they reach a fork they proceeded with suitable intuition. It was a dead end ahead; it seems a shut iron door stopped them. It was like a maze. There was no sketch of the inside of the facility; the corroded plate, which was abandoned for many years, fell to the floor. The indications in the area, whether [507] or [395], had indiscernible numerical figures. They were in a state of not knowing how many floors they were underground.

"I give up. We're completely lost" Lemon said when a collapsed ceiling leaning on the wall plugged the passage.

With not being able to go out the exit the injury in his leg was starting to hurt. Their faces, which were visible in the light from their pocket flashlight, were paler than before.

“That’s not so. For the time being, why don’t we go back to where we came from?”

“You remember?”

“Somehow. The map was sketched into my head. Why don’t we go that way?”

Before, this kind of feat would be impossible, Kaname thought.

It was five minutes. Wandering about the maze, Lemon noticed an accident. He grabbed Kaname’s arm, leaning on her shoulder they immediately stopped.

“What’s the matter?”

“Quiet. Someone’s coming. Turn of the light.”

After informing her with a concealed voice he took out a pistol from the back of his waist. He wanted to say “When did this thing get here?”, but nothing came out of his mouth. Probably, they must have taken it from Mr. Brown when they saw him.

She turned off the switch of the pocket light as he said. Lemon stretched his hand, taking the pocket lamp from her. There was a fallen locker nearby and the two of them hid behind it. Surely they could hear footsteps from faraway.

The opponent was alone.

Just before the passage before Kaname, from the “T” crossroad at the corner of the warped passage, someone was slowly getting near. There seemed to be no light. Was he wearing a night vision apparatus?

They concealed their breath. That someone was coming out from behind the corner. In the total darkness the form could not be seen, but they would know by sound.

Lemon turned on the pocket light and illuminated it towards the opponent, with pistol aimed.

“Don’t move!” he said.

The opponent looked startled and had night vision goggles covering their head.

It was a short built girl. Short pants and flight jacket. White slender legs and imbalanced, with large trekking boots. And carefully braided ash blond hair.

“Ah....”

Taking off the night vision goggles, she narrowed her eyes in the radiant light from the pocket lamp, which was inquiring towards her.

“Tessa...? Is that you Tessa!?”

“That voice.... Kaname-san?”

“Un. But why are you in a place-”

“Kaname-san!”

Before finishing her words, Tessa jumped to hug her. She ignored the existence of a surprised Lemon.

“Thank goodness.... I was so worried....it’s really Kaname-san.”

“Th...that’s right! Aah...Tessa, don’t cry. Hush hush.”

“I’m sorry. But I’m glad that you’re alright. Really thank goodness....”

“Un. Tessa also looks fine. It’s really been a long time”

Burying her face in her chest, Tessa cried for a while. Kaname was also happy, but she was taken aback with her suddenly showing herself in a place like that. She was completely confused with deep emotions.



Chapter 4: Time Hazard

He had escaped death once again.

Waking up, Sousuke thought to mentally check his body for injuries as always.

For some reason all of his body was dripping wet. His body was aching here and there, but due to the AS Pilot Suit, at most there were bruises. Only his right arm wouldn't move as he wished, that was probably due to a light sprain.

“.....”

There was the sound of water flowing, and the faint sound of the wind. But it was totally dark and nothing could be seen. Where had his night vision goggles gotten to? Sousuke searched his tactical vest for a Maglight.

Alright, there was one.

He had to switch on the light to the lowest necessary luminance. What he saw first, was the naked bare rock. Next was the entangled wire. There was also a vinyl waste basket, a wooden chair, and a torn fence. And a lot of other junk.

His surrounding space was like a round grotto. It was similar to the construction of a sewer. Water flowed on the bottom, probably knee deep. Filthy water flowing by the wreckage had gathered there from the mountains.

It was probably carried by the rapids in seasons or a period of time. Even large parts were rolling about. When Sousuke lost consciousness during the fall, it seems like he had washed there. With the flow of water stopping, the water level he had first seen seemed to have subsided. For the time being he was like garbage that had flowed into a chamber pot.

How long had he been separated? What time was it? He looked at his watch. From when he had lost consciousness it had most likely been around 15 minutes. Although he didn't know the distance he had been carried, guessing from the silence, he might have been separated from the crash site. He didn't even have his carbine gun. It must have fallen somewhere.

“Captain”

He was looking for Tessa. She couldn't be found.

“...Captain....Tessa?”

He shouted with a cautious voice, turning at the junk in his surroundings.

Among the junk was a dead skeleton, a worn out work uniform, and name plate. Gender was indistinguishable. What happened? He did not know how people had died there.

Tessa was not there after all.

Was she left in a safe place, or was she washed to another place? He didn't know whether she was even alive or not...

Dammit.

Of course the communications device would be useless. Even if it were not destroyed by the impact and water, in a closed space at a depth like that the electromagnetic-waves would not reach.

At any rate he was upstream. He had to find her.

Sousuke, with a quick pace, turned against the flow of water and retraced his steps from the Grotto. A little forward and there was a brick wall in the naked rock. It was a sewer after all. In the ruins that had not been inhabited by humans for a long time, rains and water collected and flowed to that place.

He moved forward for more than 300 meters. He could see a large hole in the ceiling. There was a slope of broken bricks and

piles of steel frame. Without any hardship he managed to climb the large hole, getting out of the layer of the sewer.

There was a large shaft. Narrower than the first elevator shaft that they descended, the height was about five stories. Turning the light higher he illuminated above his head. Going through the side of the shaft there was a passage full of skeletons and pipes. It was somehow deteriorated and worn out. Focusing his eyes he could see that in the top most space of the cave there was a squared passage. A large hole opened in the floor.

It seemed like he fell from there.

It was good that he had only suffered minor injuries. Below the passage he fell through was a scaffold and steel frame. Because of the colliding pipes and wires the five story height would not be a headlong fall.

However Tessa was another matter. It would be hard if she fell.

The light of the Maglight was weakening. Sousuke was at the base of the cave. He looked for an area where rubble and pipes were mortared and piled up. Tessa was not there, but he found the lost Carbine Gun. He picked it up and verified if it was functional. It seemed that it was not broken, but, because it fell from that height, there was no guarantee that it would fire.

Is she up there....?

He looked at the passage where he fell from since he had not found her below. Would she answer if he shouted?

No, it was dangerous.

It would be bad if he was heard. Thirty minutes had already passed from the crash. It would not be strange if the enemy reinforcements had managed to come to that area. Going up, he had to verify that passage.

Really, how unsettling.

Thinking annoyingly that it was his misfortune for falling in the hole, he immediately rethought. Originally they would be crushed by that helicopter and be flattened. Besides if he were to fall with Tessa in that hole, how would she fare without the anti-impact of an AS pilot suit?

He increased the light, following the pipe and steel frame crawling along the walls of the shaft, he climbed up. He managed to reach about three stories, but there was no way to go further up. To get out of the shaft, it seemed he had to find another route.

The nearest tunnel was formerly a passage and he jumped to the squared hole. With the shaft to his back he headed deeper into the hole. If he could find stairs going upwards it should let him go the place where he left Tessa. He kept his Maglight in the left hand, and Glock 19 hand gun in his right hand. Since there might be a possibility of the carbine gun failing, he would not use it to make the first shot. At any rate, it was in a situation where he might meet enemies so he couldn't make any gunshot sounds. It would be better to make a test shot when guns were fired.

With caution he proceeded to the ruined passage, turning at a number of corners and crossroads. There were a number of resident doors on both sides of the passage. He looked inside. Was it a staff room or lodging house? It was a room with nothing in it.

There were stairs inside the passage.

And then, in front of the stairs, stood Leonard Testarossa.

“I”

He wore a red coat on top of his AS pilot suit and had wavy silver hair. An ornamented Colt Peacemaker was in his right hand. His face couldn't be seen with the night vision goggles, but there was no mistake. It was that man.

There was no hesitation in his reply. Sousuke immediately fired.

In an instant the red coat moved, immediately stopping the bullets. It was the aforementioned reactive bulletproof vest. Not caring, he continued to fire five shots, all of them to no effect.

“The same greetings as usual----”

Leonard moved. The revolver blew fire. Sousuke hid in the door just in front of him and the enemy bullets went past. He barely managed to evade and the bullets hit the walls, scattering concrete fragments. Protruding the gun, he immediately returned fire. He used up all the remaining bullets in the magazine. The thunderous roar of the fierce gunfight resounded.

There was no response. Did he evade all of it or was all of it stopped?

“-I’m amazed at your impatience.”

You also with your usual pretension, purposely missing the chance for a surprise attack, though that was what he thought, he didn’t say a word. In the exchange of bullets he returned the Glock to his holster, and nimbly setup his carbine gun.

He’s so proud of his bullet proof clothes, but how about from a rifle bullet with a full metal jacket?

He fired in semi-auto.

As expected, he knew that he couldn’t defend from the rifle bullets. Leonard fluttered his body, and his figure disappeared from the passage. Anticipating the damage from the wall, Sousuke shot. No response. Return fire came. It went just over his head.

“.....”

The Carbine Gun’s aim seemed to be off to the right. It must have been because of the five story fall earlier. There were no other problems and it functioned. It was impressively stubborn. If he was given the opportunity, he would send mail giving thanks to the maker.

Sousuke fired, Leonard fired. Sousuke moved, Leonard moved.

That kind of reply continued a number of times, the two of them went out in the wide room. In a room like a gymnasium, a large liquid tank, a still, a compressor, countless pipes, and valves were spread all over, complexly becoming complicated.

Leonard seemed to have night vision equipment, while he was disadvantaged with only a Maglight. Aiming and moving with only the light of the Maglight, he was completely visible. He would have to infer prior to firing.

No...

That was not the only reason why he couldn't bring him down. Leonard was strong.

That reaction speed, the accuracy of that shot, it was a calm and decisive movement. Like thoughtlessness, but actually it was a logical positional gain. It was not a common technical skill. Whether it was the gift of his natural talent or from extensive training was unknown, but he couldn't be bewildered by his vagary weapons or speech. From his preconception, he thought of him as a "weak boy" relying on his hi-tech equipment for protection. He was mistaken.

"Can't be easily killed right?"

Leonard laughed in the darkness.

"Good luck, since you're no match in an AS. Now is your chance."

Sousuke remembered the uncomfortable feeling from his provocation. That was not the opponent he had faced a number of times. Previously he had had a softer demeanor. Was that an act? Or did he change into something?

"You seemed to be a little vulgar" Sousuke said flatly.

He minded himself so his Maglight wouldn't reveal his current position.

"Is that so? To get along better with you, I think this method would be better."

Gunshots. Leonard's bullets immediately grazed beside him. Using the waist high pipe as a shield, he gave pressure to his opponent by moving him from his position.

"I'll get along better with your corpse."

"Haha, you said it."

Since the start of the gunfight, almost more than three minutes had passed. It would be bad if he kept on dragging the time. Leonard's subordinates would be arriving. Although he was fixated on defeating him, to withdraw from that place... he had to decide about it soon.

Before that decision, the expected enemy reinforcements arrived. Fifteen meters to the right of the tank Sousuke was hiding behind, from the stairs above, four men with submachine guns appeared.

"Mister Silver!?" one of the men called.

"I told you not to come. Go back."

"But, you're alone-"

"Go back."

"There he is, over there!"

One of the men sensed Sousuke and fired, tearing up the tank he was hiding on. Some kind of liquid dispersed.

He returned fire. One of them got hit in the chest from Sousuke's bullet.

The remaining three deployed and added fire. The scattering bullets hit the pipe and cable, scattering fierce sparks to the surroundings.

They were well trained enemies. Not even agitated with injury, cover fire and shots with the objective to kill and wound were well cooperated. But the attacks and movements were monotonous. The composition of the team was not long.

In an expected place one of them came out. He was killed with one shot. But that man looked like he had thrown a hand grenade his way. From the hand of the fallen man, the pin of the hand grenade was pulled and falling-

“!”

There was an explosion. It was an incendiary bomb.

There was a white flash and conflagration. It was a type of hand grenade that would burn the area with super high temperature. It was most effective indoors.

There was no damage to Sousuke, who was separated, but a much more serious matter occurred.

Immediately beside the exploding incendiary bomb, there was a liquid tank. With the splash of bullets the hole widened, and the liquid content flowed out of the tank. Being left behind for more than 17 years, the unknown liquid flowed, with its combustibility mostly undeteriorated. Somehow that liquid caught fire from the grenade, and burned with a fierce heat.

The flame went along the pipe and ran around the room, with explosions occurring when taking in the conflagration. The floor split with the impact and a steel frame from the ceiling was falling towards Sousuke. Barely evading he ran inward. If he were in that room he would either be baked or suffocate.

One of the enemies screamed, falling to the lower floor from the dancing flame on the cracks of the floor. Their underfoot was shaking. The whole floor was waiting to collapse. The alcove slab distorted, and was transfigured into a slope. Everything was turning and falling.

It was no longer a battlefield. Sousuke crawled, getting away from the conflagration and the cave-in.



“Another explosion....”

The frequent sound of gunfire continued, with a large sound of an explosion. The ceiling of the rattling passage shook, with large amounts of dust falling over the heads of Kaname and the others.

“It’s probably Sagara-san. He encountered the enemy while searching for me....” Tessa said.

Kaname had already heard the details from Tessa. After being involved in the helicopter crash she had strayed from Sousuke. While searching for him alone she had met Kaname.

Sousuke would be there soon.

Hearing that, Kaname was unable to contain her feelings. Without thinking, she tried desperately to restrain herself from running off from that place.

She keeps telling herself, *If you get impatient here you will become lost*, but she was not able to discern the logic from her emotions.

She wanted to see him immediately. She couldn’t stand even one more second.

Also, she wouldn’t get lost. If she continued to call his name in a loud voice, it could somehow work. She might be seen by the enemy... That wouldn’t be, she would definitely meet him first--- such irrational thinking, it kept coming up no matter how much she erased it.

And then came the worry about the sound of that explosion.

“Let’s go find him! I know the general direction.”

“Eeh, but....” Tessa hesitated.

“But what?”

“It is certain that enemies are deployed in the direction of the explosion. Mr. Lemon’s leg is injured.... we can’t run away from the encountered enemy before Sagara-san.”

“We don’t know that right? Sousuke might be in a bad situation, I just can’t leave him.”

“That is why I’m hesitating. For me, the safety of you and Mr. Lemon-”

“Such reasons, whatever! I want to see him! If you’ll get in my way then I’ll go alone!”

There were a number of *déjà vu*. Her irritation reaching its critical point, Kaname spontaneously raised her voice.

“Please calm down. I didn’t-”

“There’s no time to calm down right? Finally....just when he’s so close. Why do you say such things? If I were to meet him, is the circumstance that bad!? Why-”

“Kaname-san, stop it.”

Lemon suddenly grabbed her arm with such strong power it surprised her. She immediately returned to her own self, and noticed herself getting distracted.

“I know how you feel, but you have to be calm. If you make rash decisions here, everything will be a mess.”

It was as he said. They had to be more prudent.

“....sorry, Tessa.”

“It’s alright. Becoming like this was all my responsibility...”

Looking at the frail Tessa mumbling, Kaname felt guilty. Even though Tessa also liked Sousuke, she did not say any selfish insensibilities. Yet she was enduring it. If Kaname had been in her place she would have flared up and talked back.

“Somehow... I’m really sorry. I don’t know what happened...”

“It can’t be helped. Because, you’re finally going to see Sagara-san.”

“Uhn....”

“If you’re calm, let’s move on” Lemon said with a serious voice. “It’s dangerous to be here. He has to get as far away from the enemy as possible. If it goes well, we might be able to find another exit. We have to get to the surface somehow. I think it would be best to contact Testarossa-san’s allies with the wireless radio.”

“But Sousuke....”

“He’ll be alright. He’s not a burden like me, and it would be easier for him to move alone, and he would aim to get to the surface to contact the allies. If we carelessly join him, there is a dangerously high probability of both parties falling.”

Even though it was unfamiliar, Lemon carried such experience in his body. It would be wise to abide by his judgment in that kind of situation.

“I understand. Let’s do that.”

Killing off the lingering affection that remained, the feelings that wanted to run off in the direction of Sousuke, Kaname nodded.

“Tessa do you know the way?”

“For the time being, just a rough construction. We get down from here, going into the deepest research facility to the north there should be a ventilation duct in an ordinary stair case. Although there is no guarantee that the enemy would not be there, it would be much safer than going to the south side....”

“North....where?”

“Here. Let’s go.”

The three of them reached a cross road. Lemon walked while being supported on both sides by Tessa and Kaname.

In the middle of the darkness, Lemon revealed a faint smile.

“What’s the matter?”

“No.... This is quite a benefit. Having beautiful girls on both sides, it would be the best if I didn’t have any injuries.”

“....Tessa. This person, shall we leave him behind?”

“That’s right.... we should at least hear his last will and testament.”

“Aah. Sorry. Sorry. Don’t abandon me.”

“Geez....”

Carrying an earnestly apologizing Lemon, they unevenly walked in the middle of the darkness.



He was sealed in.

After escaping from the flames he had finally ended up inside an underground facility after a short walk; that was what Sousuke concluded. No matter where he went collapsed ceiling and seal steel doors blocked his way. It would be nice to blow them up using C4 explosives, but there was the offensive smell of gas in the area. Unskillfully using firearms would result in an explosion.

He cautiously went back to the previous room where there was a battle. It was not be possible to get back there because the passage was plugged with crumbled steel frames and pipes. The flames were temporary and finally ending. He was thankful that the oxygen was not completely taken, but he couldn’t remain in a place like that.

He was also worried about Tessa. If the enemy managed to get into that vicinity, she might have already been captured. Since she was the sister of their commander, she might not be killed without argument, which was why he couldn't leave it to chance.

He needed to escape at once and join up with Kurz.

If he were to use the powerful Laevatein, with the support fire of Kurz, it would not be impossible to recover Tessa. Although he still didn't know if he would be able to win over Leonard's AS, at least it was a more solid plan than facing many enemies alone with an out-of-order carbine gun.

Then, what if Tessa was not yet caught?

If that were so, then she would have surely joined up with Kurz and the others. In order to carefully search for the allies in that maze, there was a need for him to eliminate all of the enemies. If he would be able to do that, he himself could not estimate-

"....!"

In the corner of his path Leonard appeared. It seemed that he had survived the explosion. Furthermore, sarcastically, he was not even filthy.

Sousuke and Leonard mutually noticed each other's existence, mostly at the same time. Both parties, with guns aimed, had fingers on the trigger but stayed from firing.

"Ooops" Leonard laughed, "If you shoot an explosion might occur. It seems that you noticed."

Piercing his nose from some time ago was an irritating odor, like rotten onions. Wasn't that a combustible LP gas? Then guns would be bad.

"Possibly, it might not occur" Sousuke said, suddenly pointing his gun at his opponent's head. He wouldn't miss at that distance. One shot would end it. But that would also be the same for the other side.



Sousuke and Leonard noticed the presence of each other almost simultaneously. Both aimed guns, fingers on the trigger. He pointed the muzzle at his opponent's head. He wouldn't miss from that distance. One shot would end it, but it was the same for the other side.

“Then want to try it? Won't that be entertaining?”

“What a charming idea.”

“You say that, but you're considering drawing that knife from your waist. With that there is no worry about explosions. Pressing on a weak me, cutting my throat with it...”

That was correct. Sousuke had his left hand always in the position to reach for the removal of his knife. In the challenge of melee, there were plenty of chances for victory.

“Funny you should mention that. I also have something like that.”

Leonard took something out from under his coat and turned it towards Sousuke. At one glance it was a simple thrusting knife that was not like a sword, there was a lever for the thumb attached

to the root of the blade. Looking at it Sousuke secretly smacked his lips.

“This is what you call a Spetsnaz Knife. Looks like you know.”

That knife was a weapon developed for the Russian Special Forces. There was a strong spring inside the grip. It was constructed such that if the lever was pushed the blade would be detached. Its construction looked like a simple toy, but its destructive power was dreadful. If detached from 10 meters it had a deadly power that could easily penetrate a telephone directory.

The condition had become disadvantageous.

His AS pilot suit had an anti-blade function but could not guard against that kind of piercing weapon. He would die if hit, or would lose with a severe wound. Furthermore a weapon that used a simple spring power would not be dangerous for a potential explosion.

However, there was only one shot. If he was protected from that shot, he could get close and bring him down.

“I know what you’re thinking” he said, seeing through what Sousuke was thinking. “Kill with whatever method. If there are no guns, then kill with a knife. If there is no knife, then kill with bare hands. If both hands are cut off, then bite on the windpipe. Even if you die you sharpen your bones, you’re the type of guy who waits to trample on the enemy. I wonder if you would think about discussions....”

“Is there a need to discuss?”

“A method to get out of here. It’s a stupid conversation, but we’re both sealed in here”

“.....”

“Propane has been leaking for a while now. Right now it’s still fine, but after two more hours both of us will either suffocate or get poisoned”

“You mean there is no need to fight.”

“Either way we’ll die. I’ve been going around, but there is a staircase over there that is plugged by rubble. If the both of us remove the rubble we could get out before we die.”

“A short time truce, you mean to say.”

“That’s right. If we fight now, whoever wins, the wounded won’t get out. Even if one of us gets injured, I don’t think it would get the work done. For the mean time we should cooperate and get out of here, after that we can just kill each other. That’s my proposal.”

Leonard’s words were not lies. The gas and escape route were also true. If they didn’t have a truce both of them would surely die.

“Alright. But in the end, it’s for the sake of getting out of here.”

With not even an atom of forgiveness, he had to go along with Leonard’s proposal. Both of them put down their weapons at the same time.

“Fine. Should we shake hands?”

“Bullshit.”

Sousuke put his carbine gun over his shoulder, and headed to the stairs with a quick pace.



The Airborne troops of Amalgam, which were under the command of Kalinin, had finished securing the majority of the

ruin's surface. Although it was secured, they could not confirm any signs of the enemy.

He himself also got off to the surface, investigating the other helicopter that descended in the ruins. He noticed that there were two people who walked to the research plant; in addition he managed to see through that those two people were Sagara Sousuke and Teletha Testarossa.

Most probably, they were under that plant.

Leonard might also have noticed that. He had also independently moved into the plant, and no communications could be made. After that a four man scout also went in, and after the last contact of "Gunshots have been heard" no further communications were made. They had fought Sousuke; he could only think that the tables had turned.

After a few minutes, reports from his subordinates confirmed his conjecture.

The crashed helicopter exploded and caught fire in another area. Again, guaranteeing survivors on the crash site, that evidence pointed to Chidori Kaname and the Frenchman being alive. And then Leonard's whereabouts were unknown, and the movements of Sousuke and the others were unknown.

It seemed there was a strange thing happening underground. Having been cut off from the majority of their force on the surface, he couldn't possibly let his forces get near the plant.

"Leave the surface to me," Casper said standing by on his AS. "I'll take care of those who come near."

"....understood. I leave it to you"

Kalinin said such and brought along a few soldiers and began to head to the plant's underground, descending the shaft.



Because of Tessa's guidance the three of them had not encountered the enemy and continued to proceed through the plant's underground. But then, they were running away from the direction of the enemy so it was not unnatural.

Going through the deepest part to get out of the opposite side... the plan itself Kaname understood, but getting deeper into the maze was very unpromising.

"Is it really this way?" Kaname asked Tessa countless times.

Even she herself did not know how many times it was asked. It was because of the frequency of the *déjà vu*.

"Eeh. It should be but...."

Tessa hesitated to say. The route was another matter, and she had the appearance of being puzzled.

"...if you head straight of this curve, you will get out on the opposite side. From there, if you look for a ladder in the stairs, you could get to the surface."

"Aside from that, what are you trying to say?"

"Eeh"

Tessa stood to a stop.

"...I guess I can't leave it alone. I have to visit it. You should proceed, please go on ahead."

Kaname and Lemon were surprised at her words.

"What do you mean? A place to visit...."

"The enemy will be here soon. It's dangerous for you to be alone."

"Don't worry. Besides, originally there is something I need here. Coming this far, I just can't give up."

"What exactly do you need? We'll also accompany you."

"It's not that far right? Let's go."

With the proposal from Kaname and Lemon, Tessa shook her head.

“No, you can’t come. Anyway it’s something important....I will do it alone.”

It was a bad enunciation for Tessa’s explanation. Even though she knew something, she wouldn’t tell it to Kaname and Lemon. No, not Kaname, but Lemon. Right now he had a proactive collaboration with Tessa, but to begin with he was French Intelligence. If there was a great secret in the plant, there was no guarantee that the contents wouldn’t be transmitted to the organization.

Lemon himself had noticed that.

“Could it be, that you can’t tell me this?”

Tessa fell silent. In other words saying that was so.

“About this secret city, Wraith and I risked danger to investigate it. Whatever was in here, without knowing the details, we silently did what you asked and went to Moscow. And then I became like this, moreover I don’t know if Wraith is alive or not. Even then, you can’t tell me the circumstance. It’s that right?”

“I am very grateful to you. But this is----”

“My allegiances? If it’s the DGSE, I’m sure I’m already fired. I haven’t been in contact with my superiors.”

“You’re mistaken. Of course I’m also concerned about the information leaking to your organization, but that is not the only problem. The secret here is not about the national security of one nation. If handled unskillfully... the fate of the people of the world might get trifled with.”

“That’s exaggerated.”

“No. Even moderately, it is not exaggerated. If you knew the secret the sleeps in here, most people would be charmed by the power and use it. It’s alright to tell Kaname-san. Sagara-san would

also be alright. Speaking as the persons concerned, these two and me, we're already burdened with this secret. But, you Lemon-san--being tempted by it, I do not have the confidence in it."

He was embarrassed by her words, Kaname also understood.

"I really don't understand. If I were to know about that secret, I should leave it to your monopoly?"

"That may not be unreasonable- that at least is an important problem. That is why, could you go ahead with Kaname-san?"

"That a hard request.... Then, how about this."

After saying that, Lemon took out the automatic pistol from his belt.

"Wai...."

Kaname's expression changed. But turning on the safety device, he turned the gun and handed it over to Tessa.

"Take it. If I started thinking strange, shoot me."

"Lemon-san, I—"

"Ahead of this, I'm not sure if I would be able to return alive. Then I would like to know.please."

It seems that she was in deep worry. As far as what could be seen, Lemon was a good person, she couldn't say whether this was an act or not. After one minute he could suddenly change, exactly who should warn them?

But in the end it was concluded as "unavoidable". Tessa made a deep sigh, and carefully took the pistol that he handed her.

"....I understand. However, if you showed any signs of change then I will really shoot."

"R...really?" Kaname asked, Tessa nodded.

"I'm serious. I will shoot with all my power. Though I don't know if it will hit or not...."

"I..is that so..."

“Kaname-san. I thought about telling you this. Even if I didn’t, having brought you here, my brother would have told you. Possibly this....”

“Possibly, what?”

“No. Anyway, since we’ve decided to go we must hurry. This way.”



It was an unusual cooperative work, and it continued in the darkness.

Even with both of them pulling it took them more than five minutes to move the unyielding steel frame. They receded the concrete and rocks in the surroundings first; it was a hard struggle for ten minutes. Finally the aforementioned steel frame could be move with just a kick.

Sousuke and Leonard only made exchanges to the most minimal degree required and did not say anything more. It was only to the degree of something like “get that off” or “pull this”.

Of course they did not let their guards down. Whenever the opponent would change his mind, he would immediately pull out his knife, and would not turn his back whenever necessary.

No matter the situation the other man was an enemy. They did not forget this decision.

“Oh well....”

Leonard rested his hands. He did not seem tired, only bored of the simple work.

“Don’t rest on your own.”

With the words of Sousuke, he shrugged his shoulders and returned to work.

It was not a bad performance. And not because he was powerless. For someone who didn't know much but wore a suit, it was a strange feeling looking at him working like that.

"Tessa must also have come here right? Aren't you worried about her?"

Not being able to stand the boring work, Leonard spoke.

His manner of speaking didn't seem like he was trying to pinpoint Tessa's location. It might be a bluff, but he thought that he might have guessed that Tessa would be in the ruins. But there was no reason for him to offer such information, and so he feigned innocence.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I don't think you'd come here alone. She is the one who has a need here."

"I don't know. I also don't feel like answering."

"Aah, is that so?" Leonard said with a searching voice, taking an armful of reinforced concrete, and putting it down below the stairs.

"What if I tell you that Chidori Kaname is here, well?"

Sousuke, gripping the fragments of the conduits with his hands, suddenly stopped.

"Did you bring her? In these ruins?"

"Don't rest on your own. Hey."

It must have been revenge for before. Leonard made a smirk in the darkness. Even with annoyance, he didn't say a word and continued to work.

"A helicopter came crashing down the large elevator shaft right? She was riding in that."

"What was that?"

“Then later the helicopter exploded, and burned up. Although we haven’t confirmed the corpse, it was because of your attacks.”

For an instant his muscles grew cold, Sousuke immediately decided that it must be a lie. If Kaname were truly dead, he wouldn’t be talking comfortably there like that. Although he didn’t know whose death that man would be saddened by, at least he wouldn’t laugh about it.

“You don’t seem to believe me. There is no mistake that what I’ve just said is the truth. I was in the hanger of the helicopter in my AS, it was simple to escape. She was in the front cabin. Whatever happened to her, even I don’t know.”

“Nonsense.”

“It’s true. Chidori Kaname was riding that helicopter.”

“Then, why do you talk so optimistically?”

“That’s right. That’s a good question. ...well, it’s time we start moving. Let’s try it.”

“Let’s go.”

Somehow the two of them grabbed on the unmoving steel frame, and pulled with full strength. The base covered with rubble slowly began to give, and they finally pulled it free.

“Alright. Well then....where were we? That’s right, her condition.”

Returning to manual labor, Leonard continued the topic.

“It is true that she was on the helicopter that crashed. I didn’t rescue her, the helicopter exploded and burned. Even then she is alive, I am confident about it. That’s a point.”

“What are you talking about?”

Sousuke really did not know the meaning in Leonard’s words. For example if Kaname being in the helicopter was true,

why did he have that confidence? Additionally, why purposely say so?

“I’ve also tested it before. Just before your struggle in Hong Kong. She was targeted by an Assassin ordered by Gauron and was attacked in the business district of Tokyo. Under the rain. I was in there hiding. I did nothing and only watched.”

“.....”

“Think generally. An assassin that was a protégé of Gauron, and a high school girl with good reflexes. No matter how you think it would be her end. But she was saved.”

“She has good luck.”

“That’s right, she has good luck- abnormally so.”

There was a hidden enigma in Leonard’s words.

“During the attack, that assassin used his first gun. The first shot missed, and emptied the cartridge. In such an opportunity she managed to run away.”

It was the first time that he heard of that. Even from Kaname, he didn’t hear the details about it. Aside from the small AS called Alastor, and the meeting with Leonard and two to three conversations, he knew nothing more.

“It was not rare for the automatic pistol to malfunction.”

“That’s right. But if you were going to kill someone with a gun, before that what do you do?”

“That’s...”

Confirm the function of the gun, and inspect that there was nothing wrong with the bullets. Blundering at the start, no matter what kind of target it was, it would be difficult if the target were to be absorbed to the killing rhythm. That was why you had to make certain from the start, to be very careful in preparing to send the target to the other world.

That assassin was also the same.

Aside from the coincidence that the bullet missed, the gun also broke down.

“She has good luck, that girl. It’s a little unbelievable right?”

“Is that why she is alive from the helicopter crash?

Something is wrong.”

“Is that so? You also have some knowledge of it. How many times has she barely escaped danger in the nick of time? I think that the way she lives is strange.”

“That’s....”

With his nose indicating a smile, Sousuke couldn’t deny it. That was correct. When he met her, she was involved with countless dangers. Among them were even some aspects that would give Sousuke chills, and he had experienced the scene of carnage.

Was that also luck? No, that shouldn’t be.

“She never gives up and continues to move. Judging what she can do in her circumstance, according to her will and beliefs. The meaning in that is that she is similar to an ordinary veteran soldier.”

Of course Sousuke could not deny what’s called “luck”. He himself was also alive because of luck. Being a soldier himself with enough abilities, he could also be killed with a single stray bullet. But luck was a persistent element attached to it. There was a saying “Man prospers, God disposes”, luck surely must be “god’s will”. Being bothered by luck, only then would action follow.

If you remove the ability of a Whispered, Kaname Chidori was by no means a non-rare human. More than an ordinary human, she was a little stronger. Actually that was a difficult matter, but that was not a rare disposition.

“I recognize her great will and activity. But, will you think about this? She would happen to have this kind of ability herself, her luck.”

“It’s just a bending theory.”

Then the people who had filled their life expectancy, all of it would have to be luck. A required environment to live the full life would mean having the required ability. There were already a hundred million people among the world.

“Well, that might be. This matter is just going around in circles. Also, as for not being dead, it was not luck, but inevitability.”

“Inevitability?”

“She is the convergence point of cause and effect. You can say that the world is strange because she is here, or you can say that she is here because the world is strange. From now she will be, probably even without any arrangement from me, she would be meeting with the dead of this relic. There she would unite with the power to put a full stop on history. Becoming the ‘KANAME (Key Stone)’ that would create a world without a past, future and present.”

“I don’t understand. What are you saying?”

“About the Omni Sphere and the Whispered. The chaos of the world will start from this ground.”



The frequency of the déjà vu was evidently high.

Kaname also felt that she had walked the long and narrow passage a number of times, and felt that the small abusive language of Lemon and the cough of Tessa were heard a number of times. Having too much déjà vu seemed to be laborious. She had to

clearly gather her will in front to preserve her true nature. But even then, the indescribable fatigue was accumulating throughout the nerves of her whole body.

“My head seems to feel funny” Lemon muttered.

Those words were heard countless times.

“I’m sure it’s just ahead. But I feel that the door gets farther and farther away. I somehow understand what a mountain climber feels....”

“Don’t worry. We’ll get there.”

There was fatigue oozing out of Tessa’s words.

“Just ahead is the center of the research facility. The device that Professor Valov and the research team created would be sleeping there unharmed.”

“The effect would be coming from the device right?”

“Yes. But strictly speaking, it is not the fault of the current device. Since there is no electricity, it’s not functioning.”

“Being the effect of a device that stopped, I really don’t understand...”

“It’s a little hard to explain- the effects of that device, would be coming from the past. 18 years ago, the psychic waves of its full operation are being transmitted to this period”

“The past? Psychic waves?”

“It’s the Omni Sphere that I’ve explained a while ago. This center is ground zero. Everything started from here.”

Gradually, really gradually, the three of them managed to reach the center. They passed a number of massive doors. They were lucky they were not locked, and the weight of it was opened by both Tessa and Kaname.

In there was an extensive hall-like space. It was many times wider than a school gymnasium. In the inner walls were drum type

units; countless numbers of them sticking closely to each other. One by one they were the size of a truck's tire.

And then in the center of the vast hall was a large dome-type structure. It looked like a globular gas tank in Japan, and the larger half cut. On its outside surface, similar to the inner wall of the hall, clung hundreds of drum type units.

“What is this place....?” Lemon said with uneasiness.

Looking alert, an ordinary human would not know what kind of facility it was. Speaking only of its atmosphere, it looked like a photo of a neutrino observation facility. Constructed deep underground, strange and exaggerated- it was an experimental device for a simple purpose. It was thought that with an enormous budget and with the required resources it would become a large-scale device like that... it was arrogant space. Even being organized as it was, the device had an abnormal eccentric feel to it.

As a scientific apparatus, it would rather be like a heretic temple ruined in ancient times.

Due to the deterioration, the inside of the drum was lost from the inner wall and rolled to Kaname and the others. Probably, the drum was an amplification device. The insides were enclosed special electrical circuits that substituted human intellect.

No, during that period such a scale of circuits couldn't be built. Unless-

“Kaname-san. Are you uneasy about the contents of this drum?”

“Un, could it be....”

“I don't think it's the brains of humans as expected.” Tessa said with a voice without vigor. “Probably, they used the brains of other high class mammals. Professor Valov's team seemed to be researching the brains of dolphins. The victims of this atrocity were probably them.”

“How cruel....”

Talking about one or two heads would already be sickening, but that facility had thousands of them in the same drum. Kaname tried to refrain from vomiting.

They already understood. Those ruins were the product of evil and madness.

If not so, even if the victims were not humans, such cruelty should not exist.

“This is TAROS?”

“Yes. This device was created by Professor Valov, the world’s first TAROS. Although he called it ‘Mental Communication Device’. The current TAROS loaded into the Laevatein and the *de Danaan* used the latest technology in large scale logic element- using AI and Dana as an amplifying device, making it possible to transmit and respond to the Omni Sphere.”

“However, the period that created this device should not be possible. That is why the amplification of a living brain....”

“That’s right. To keep the large resources of brain organization from dying, in order to control the chemical of such activity various kinds of diverse drugs were refined in this Yamsk 11 Plant. To keep the secret the production facility was collected within the town. The former town that this was, many excellent specialists were gathered from the Eastern countries. The majority of these scientists did not know the whole aspect of the experiment. Having to investigate this far took me quite some time. Exposing Lemon-san to danger, the different pieces were put into place.”

“Tessa you’ve gone to that much hardship.... no matter how many secret towns there are, aren’t there any people that know remaining?”

“None of them remained. Because the people of the town, those who remained, either died or are crippled. And in merely one night.”

“....what exactly happened?”

“During the full operational test an accident occurred. TAROS went berserk, radiating an extremely strong psychic wave. The people within the 30 kilometer radius of this center received a serious mental contamination.... later it would be shown on the ruins outside. People who lost their sanity killed, and continued to commit suicide. There are also many people in distant places who were killed by the shock.”

Although Kaname had not seen the streets, she could imagine what had happened. There was no mistake that it developed into a scene of Hell.

“A telepathic version of the Chernobyl huh?” a silent and listening Lemon muttered.

“That’s right. There are a variety of psychic waves that radiate through the Omni Sphere. One that weakens by distance and time is the Iota wave. What contaminated the residents of Yamsk 11 was this Iota wave. The effects are comparatively confined in an area. And then the other is the Tau wave. This has no relation to distance and time. It is a psychic wave with a property that can be transmitted over a distance without getting weak. This has no influence for an ordinary person, except for an instant degree of *déjà vu*. However, the effects of this Tau wave are wide. I think that it has been transmitted to all over the world.”

“But, nobody noticed....”

“Yes. It cannot be observed physically, and there are no persons who received the effects. However, there are exceptions. During the berserk of TAROS, this is just an assumption, roughly 18 years ago, December 24, 1981, 11:50 Greenwich Mean Time

continuing for about three minutes. In this moment the effects were received by the people who are exceptions. Do you know what kind of people these are?"

"Well..... I guess it's us."

Lemon's head turned to one side, Kaname made a deep sigh.

That might be the biggest sigh for humans. Listening that much, she finally understood.

My secret. Our secret.

"The newborn baby. The moment they woke up."

"That's right, it's us."

She still remembered it now. During primary school there were research subjects like "let's inspect the incidents on the day you were born". At that time it was shown to the birth mother. December 24, Tokyo time was 20:50. Greenwich Mean Time would be 11:50.

Mother.

You should have birthed me 1 minute earlier.....

"As to why would the Tau wave effected the newborn babies at the moment of their birth....we still don't fully know that. In the explanation of a Physiologist, Alice Miller, the moment a newborn baby is born there is special activity in the basal ganglia and Occipital lobe. However, at present there is no medical verification. There is no consent from mothers."

"Well that's right.... there are no mothers that would agree to having electrodes stuck into the brain of a child just before birth."

"With the creation of a more advance apparatus, I think there is a way to investigate this.... to be delivered into a special Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Apparatus. If ever in the future, that Kaname-san chances to give birth to a baby, would you let me conduct an experiment?"

“Wha..what are you saying. Why don’t you do it yourself!?”

“But, I will probably be alone for the rest of my life....”

“What’s with that bitter face?”

“Nothing. But, that’s right.... If Kaname-san would lend Sagara-san to me sometimes, I’ll do the experiment myself.”

“You say that easily....”

“You don’t want to?”

“Of course!? Well, in the first place, he and I are not really...”

“I’m joking. Don’t be seriously troubled by it.”

“....hey you”

Kaname shook her shoulders, Lemon timidly raised a voice from the side.

“Um. Right now, we were talking about something very serious but....”

“Ah, that’s right.”

“Sorry, we got carried away.”

Kaname and the others were near the giant dome in the center of the hall. Tessa, seemingly looking for the passage inside, walked along the outer circumference of the dome.

“Well then.... Children who were imprinted by the Tau wave at the moment of their birth. They were the Whispered. Nonetheless, we did not receive the vast knowledge from that short instant. Connecting to the Omni Sphere, I think we gained the ability to receive another psychic wave from some future.”

“Some future?”

“Yes. The Omni Sphere retrogrades information through time. We did not receive information on technology not yet known from birth, but ‘receive’ information through psychic waves from the future. The imprinting during birth would be to have the minimum required ability for that reception.”

“In other words, it’s like an access code or a protocol.... With that, when the child grows up the intelligence rises, by some kind of chance, it would receive the suspicious electromagnetic waves.”

“That’s how it is.children born in the said three minutes, what was recorded all over the world was 174 persons. With the healthcare system of underdeveloped countries, there are children with no accurate birth records, and it is actually much more numerous. A rough estimate would multiplied by that... around more than 350 people. However, the confirmed Whispered at the present are only a handful, less than 10.”

“Why is that?”

“The age where the Whispered ability awakens might be dependent on individual differences. And aside from the time of birth, there is a possibility of other conditions to become a Whispered. The ‘qualities’ are different though. There are many individual differences when humans are born, and it would not be mysterious for those born to not be affected by the Tau wave. Currently those ‘complication ratio’ is less than 3%, and would not be considered as unnatural figures. In any event, we are currently the communication terminal that receives the output of technology information from the future.”

“It is an unbelievable story” Lemon muttered. His face being pale was not only because of his injuries. “Technology information sent from the future. Then that means technology and weapons came from that information.”

“That’s right. The AS was the start of ‘Technology that shouldn’t exist (Black Technology)’.”

There was no inflection in the words of Tessa. In the wide darkness with nobody but the three of them, her voice resounded with a vacant tone.

“I think that the effects of the Black Technology most probably started around the mid 80’s. The same children as us Whispered, there were records that these abilities had started to display at around age three. My father, while still alive, was investigating this.”

“80’s? Then, the world right now....”

“Yes. The world has been affected by Black Technology for fifteen years, it would not be difficult to imagine. The explosive advancement of elliptical computer technology. The innovative invention in the field of energy. The dramatic change in radar technology....”

Originally, the development of those enterprises were not yet developed. Enterprises that should have collapsed have not collapsed. Military operations that were supposed to end in failure succeeded. The international economy received a different effect. There might be a change in the result of a large country’s election, originally it may have had a different administration, or it may have had a different policy.

A collapsed country, might not have collapsed.

A country preserving its unity might have split up.

And then, it is possible, The American-Russian cold war might have ended.

“For arguments sake the ‘Original History’-- if there is a history that has no Black Technology present (something that is mostly on conjecture)-- I think the science technology would still be unchanged from the start of the 80’s. Computer voice recognition on a suspicious level, the existence of Palladium Reactor, the materialization of a bipedal robot technology, and that sort would not exist.”

“Then were talking about Technology?”

“Yes. Those brought about the effects in Political economics and military affairs.... complex conjectures are impossible. The whole surface might have gone into nuclear warfare, or the reverse, the cold war might have ended. In any case, it is a different world than we know of. A group of people that would know this truth would call this situation a ‘Time Hazard’. It’s just, that in the first place an ‘Original History’, it is unknown if it exists or not. If the appearance of Whispered and interference of the Omni Sphere are inevitable, this might be a natural occurrence.”

“It’s something of a large scale that I can’t imagine.... just now, how many times had a déjà vu come? My head has really become strange.”

“Please steady your head, Lemon-san. Where we are right now is the center of where the Time Hazard occurred. We cannot predict what effects it would have on the mind.”

“The center.... But isn’t it strange? The world rotates, revolving. Moving in the center of the solar system and the Milky Way. If it were in the strict coordinates, the ‘here’ 18 years ago would be somewhere beyond space right?”

“No. The Omni Sphere exists in the mind of the area it was first activated, and has absolutely no relation to the physical world’s coordinates. It is not something similar to the Ether Space of the past. That is why the livelihood domain of humans, in other words on the surface world, ‘existing here’ could not be explained. The Omni Sphere adheres to the Earth and moves together with it, and the coordinates system on the earth makes Yamsk 11 ground zero, there are other faulty expressions but.... it would be better to think of the situation like that.”

“It’s difficult.... Even so, these ruins have been uninhabited for a long time. If there are no people, the Omni Sphere wouldn’t exist right?”

“It’s not because there are no people that it doesn’t exist. I think the expression ‘it has no meaning’ is more correct. Besides, this place is different. The effects of the incident 18 years ago still remain to the present day, no, it reaches here.”

They found the entrance to the dome. It was similar in height to Tessa, a narrow hatch.

“Aah..... I really don’t understand. Kaname-san, how about you?”

“I...”

Kaname, who had been silent for a while, felt her head was heavy. It was the because of the said *déjà vu*. Step by step, she felt painful advancing forward. Like walking in a heavy viscous liquid with resistance and discomfort. Then there was an order of precedence.

“I... understand.”

She understood.

They were not simple uninhabited ruins. What was waiting ahead?

“Aah..... I really don’t understand. Kaname-san, how about you?” Lemon said.

“Lemon-san. You’re repeating yourself.”

“Aah..... I really don’t understand. Kaname-san, how about you?”

“Lemon-san?”

“Kaname-san, how about you?”

“Lemon-san!”

“How about you?..... about you? you? you? ou? u, u, uwawaauwaua.....uwaaaaaaa!!”

It was a scream with a frozen spine. Lemon's mind was being plucked from his body. Like receiving an electromagnetic shock averting his spine, his whole body shook violently.

"Hi....!?"

"Stopstopstopstopstopdon'tdon'tdon'tdon'tdon'tdon'tdon't!!"

"Lemon-san!!"

Looking down upon Kaname, who was only shivering, Tessa thrust him away with full power. Lemon staggered, and fell to his backside a few meters away from the dome. Even then his struggle did not stop.

"Let's pull him back! Help me!"

"Eh? Ah, yes."

Lemon, who continued to scream despite falling, was pulled out into the exterior hall. Finally his derangement stopped. He lied down with a sobbing voice.

"What was that? What exactly is this...."

"I don't know. But, probably—" Tessa muttered. "The Iota waves that were emitted from the center of the facility are stronger than expected. With a strong feedback from the Omni Sphere, Lemon-san fell into panic. It's because he is a normal human."

"Right. When I first felt the electromagnetic waves in North Korea, it was this kind of feeling. It because we have grown accustomed to it, those unskillful might be shocked to death...."

"This was beyond supposition. At this rate, we can't bring him inside."

There was no reason to recklessly bring him in. Rather, if this was favorable to Tessa, she didn't have the appearance of being glad.

"But the Iota wave, there must be something inside?"

“That’s right. However, but more than my hypothesis, the distant strength is-”

Tessa faced down and coughed in nausea.

“Tessa, are you alright?”

“Yes. Why don’t you wait with Lemon-san? There is no need for you to recklessly accompany me. Here with him-”

When Tessa was saying that, Kaname firmly gripped her hand.

“Alright. Let’s go.”

“...yes.”

Holding Kaname’s hand, Tessa once again started walking towards TAROS- the center of the dome.



“Stopping History. What’s that?” Sousuke asked.

Leonard muttered something in the middle of the deep darkness. *Machenschaft Als Herrschaft Des~....* He did not hear the last part. It was most likely German, he didn’t understand the meaning.

“Huh?”

“I wonder if that’s Heidegger. ‘A construction that controls the creation and the created’. Or possibly Self Cause (Causa Sui). It’s only by association. The connection between cause and effect is to go because of going. Well, it’s about philosophy. Anyway setting free the principle of causality, we have lived thus far in this different world. If Fate and Destiny are indeed to become free- what would man wish for at that time? I am progressing for that preparation.”

Principle of causality? Fate?

Sousuke didn’t entirely understand the meaning of that.

“You heard about the Omni Sphere from my sister right?”

“A little.”

“Even TAROS?”

“Once. A device that accesses the Omni Sphere, and the ability to operate the Lambda Driver.”

“The Lambda Driver was just an extra. It was for convenience.”

“It seems so.”

“These ruins are where the world’s first TAROS was created, and a berserk incident occurred. As a result, children who were to arrive at the same time became the Whispered.the real importance the Omni Sphere holds is the transmission of a variety of electromagnetic waves from that area, not being restricted from time and space. Whispered are persons capable of transmitting information from the past or future. With its effect we made this world different from the ‘original world’. Another history, another time axis, another world. Originally AS should not exist, even Mithril shouldn’t. Amalgam also would be a different organization.”

“That’s absurd. Such a thing-”

“It’s up to you to believe it or not. But this is the truth- how do you think you should treat this world?”

“I don’t have to treat anything. I should just leave it alone.”

Wherever the world may be, for Sousuke, such things had no interest to him.

History changed? Then what about it? Even if it were the truth, the truth surrounding him would not change.

There are enemies, there are allies.

There are battle tactics, there are mission objectives.

Actions that should be done, information to look at that needs to be known, something that should be heard.

“Would it be alright continuing like this?”

Leonard laughed.

“Of course not. Those that should exist are gone, those that shouldn’t exist are here. People who should have lived are dead, those who should have died are still alive. This world has gone mad. We have to correct it. Someone who has the power to do so...”

“The one who’s mad is you. I don’t know what kind of methods you have to reform the world but-”

“It’s not world reformation.”

His fed-up scornful voice echoed in the darkness.

“It’s not worthless politics. Inclining the Earth’s axis, think about the occurrences of natural disasters. If there is a way to return things, it would be ordinary to think about returning it right? Returning the world to what it was originally. What is mad about that?”

“I’m not a great genius like you. Even if you say the world is mad, no feelings would grow. I really don’t understand, but what you say about ‘returning the world’ would be to deny the environment that we have lived in, right? Even for enemies and allies. That is what I do not like.”

“Then listen to this, do you have comrades in arms that have died? Relatives or friends, surrounding comrades that you have lost?”

“Of course.”

The comrade in arms in Afghanistan. And the mercenaries he met after. There were many of them. Those who were with him in the operations of Mithril. Matt Shade of the intelligence department. Uruz 1, Gail McAllen. PRT’s Lian Shaopin. Gebo 9’s pilot Eva Santos and her crew. Colleagues who died in the battle at Merida Island that he heard of- Castello. Speck. Several officers of the West Pacific Fleet.

And then- Nami.

No matter how many of them there were, there were at least a few people who died because he didn't have enough strength. Especially Nami of Namsak, just the fleeting memory of her name sent pain down his heart. *Nami. Sorry. If I were only a second faster in saving you-*

"You have, right? You have many deaths. Don't you regret them?"

"....I have no obligation to answer."

"No, you regret them. But, 'originally', the majority of them should still be alive. The Black Technology that the Whispered brought about changed warfare, surely the fate of those surrounding people were obviously affected. The lives that they should have, are you going to deny them this? Saying coldly 'leave them alone' and abandoning them. Who would be the one who's mad?"

"I'm not abandoning them....!"

He understood the expectations of his opponent, but even so Sousuke raised his voice.

"Can you say that to them? 'It was unfortunate that you died, give up. There is a way to save you, but I don't want to try it'?"

"What you're saying is nonsense. You can't save those who have died. Time axis of the past of the future, they won't be resurrected by such theories."

"Hmm. You don't seem to be saying that with a rock head. Why do you think so?"

"Because I'm a killer" Sousuke said, gazing at Leonard. "Before, it is as you said to Chidori. I killed more than 100 people. I don't know the accurate number. And there is no need to know. There were a number of people riding in the truck which I blew up

in the gorge of Afghanistan, but I did not count. Generally speaking, I stole the lives of countless of men. That is why I understand. I feel I know it.”

“Hmm. In other words?”

“Human death is absolute. They won’t come back again. If you can somehow bring them back as a puppet, then they would be another person.”

“Why is that? If the body, mind and environment are the same, then they would be the same person, right?”

“You’re mistaken. Death itself is a part of humans. A personality until the last moment. That is why we seriously fight with full devotion. This is the only unchanging absolute rule. Even that Gauron abided by this. That person is the garbage of humans, but simultaneously knew the fleeting moment of life. The differences between him and me are what is being enjoyed and what is not being enjoyed.”

“Very interesting view” Leonard said, laboriously taking up the concrete lump. “Gauron, huh? This talk, about made time and destiny, he also mentioned this. He didn’t doubt. But he didn’t concern himself. He said something similar to you. Even though you were fated enemies, having the same opinion. Isn’t it cynicism?”

“It’s not cynicism or what. It was a warrior’s unwritten law.”

“Gauron is a warrior?”

“At least. But you’re different.”

He had no intention of disdain. Sousuke only spoke what he felt. “*You’re different*”. But his words stimulated something inside of Leonard.

“I see. Then, you have to hear this; would Kaname dying be the same thing?”

“.....”

Sousuke did not say anything. He didn't understand it himself.

"You don't know, right?"

There was no pride resounding in Leonard's voice.

"If I were in your place, well, I couldn't accept that. A rule or an unwritten law... because this is a world that has no need of such procedures. Aren't you people perceiving things in simplicity? Good or evil, likes and dislikes, enemies and friends- you don't believe in dualism right?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"I don't know. Unexpectedly, I think there might be no need for us to fight."

Unexpected words.

No need to fight- Why did he say such words?

You appeared to us as enemies from the start. Standing as an obstruction to our mission, many friends died, and then you took Kaname away.

There was no thought of reconciliation.

"I understand. It's not that I'm talking about peace. No matter how I say it, the answer would be NO, right?"

"Of course."

"Your stubbornness is no different from the fundamentalism of a terrorist. However Mr. Kalinin was wrong. He was hesitant at first."

"....the Lt. Commander?"

"The first time I made contact with him was last Christmas. Even after listening to the current mad world, he did not immediately believe. However, he seemed to think long and hard. During the great assault last January."

"Your nonsense would not make him double cross."

“I’ll reveal some proof to you. Using an ordinarily unforeseeable natural phenomenon, Amalgam gave Mithril a great blow, so to say.”

“Natural phenomenon?”

“The Solar Wind. With the influence of a large scale solar activity, it is known that most communications would be down. I foresaw it using TAROS. It is impossible to predict the surface climate and society, but it was not difficult to predict solar activity. The activity of humans living in a small planet, there is nothing that could affect the sun. Knowing the exact second, I used that. If not, Amalgam would not be able to strike a great blow to Mithril in such a short time.”

During the aforementioned great offensive he heard that Kalinin’s state was strange.

That was because of Leonard’s prediction. Using the absolutely unpredictable solar activity Amalgam devised an attack. There was no more “proof” than that. TAROS and Omni Sphere, history’s accident that made a communication method to cross time. All of it was true.

“Then he agreed. With a means to correct the mistake, I have that power. The ally that he followed is accurately not Amalgam, but me.”

“Impossible...”

Andrei Kalinin, wasn’t he the personification of that “Warrior’s unwritten law”? Beside the possibility of “correcting the mad world”, it was unthinkable that he would ride along that plan. For him to accept failure, defeat, and every kind of blow, on top of those he would construct the “next mission”.

If not. If he were not so, us who have been fighting under him, for what purpose were we fighting for, exhausting all power?

“Andrei Kalinin is a realistic man. I also understand if you do not accept this. That is why no explanation was made.”

“The Captain- Tessa knew this?”

“She should know. On top of that, she did not explain anything, and obstructs my objective. Why is that? Do you know?”

“There are people in Mithril who would approve of what you’re saying.”

“That is correct. That is why Teletha did not explain everything. Letting bygones be bygones, and thinking of letting history continue. Facing forward is splendid, but it was a reason of self intoxication. There is also the revenge towards Amalgam. Going against controlling the world. But that girl’s first motive was to go against me. Denying me of what I should be doing, thinking of showing her own power.”

“She is not that kind of selfish person.”

“I don’t care about her true intentions. But it is as what I’ve said, having the pretext of wrong principle. In short, a child. Because she’s smarter than ordinary people, all the more she will manage it. There is a theory attached inside of her.”

Extracting the steel pipe buried in the rubble, there was a sound of the surrounding concrete breaking. There was a hole no larger than an arm, from there blew a cold wind.

Just a little more.

If they removed the surrounding rubble, they could go through the opposite passage.

“Amalgam right now, is radically headed to deterioration.”

Removing the rubble, Leonard surprisingly said that.

“Although no one notices it. What I am going to do, the plan to fully stop the history of the mad world, needs considerable calculations and resources. The democratic system is inconvenient. That is why I’m going to break the lever.”

“Break the lever?”

“The introduction of a dictatorship. Destroying the equilibrium of the management’s power, spreading distrust and fears. Then a person will appear to execute the brilliant activity, using the carrot and stick in the dark forming alliances using influences. It is simply troublesome work, but will take form in half a year. Due to the activities of Mr. Kalinin.”

“In other words, you will be the dictator.”

“We still haven’t arrived at that stage. Mostly we’re grasping the background of the important leaders and will finish off their communications network like a virus. The communications network is not the internet. It’s more of a primitive coded system, so nobody noticed. Amalgam also has made use of this for dozens of years, quietly increasing it.”

Although he didn’t have any intention of giving away the coded system, Leonard’s words were already important information. Also easily speaking about the actual circumstance of his own organization...

“Why are you telling me this?”

“I thought it might be a good idea to tell you. You guys are desperately fighting, someday Amalgam will decline. No- that representation is amusing. Before that, this world will be corrected from the mistaken form.”

Coming that far, Sousuke couldn’t possibly think of what that man was boasting about. If Leonard were mad, the conversation would be over. But in the unfortunate matter, that was not the reality. Kalinin had sided with him, Amalgam certainly had shown some strange movement, and then the unnatural question about the world... it all coincided with what Tessa said.

It was not a lie, and it was not madness.

Then, what kind of method would be used to execute that plan?

“Chidori being necessary, was it for that plan’s purpose?”

“That’s exactly it. Right now, a new TAROS is being constructed in another place. This TAROS, so far, has a structure that has no problems in scale. Its power is to interfere with the past, an ordinary Whispered can’t be used as a catalyst. A much larger power for imprinting, most probably there is only one suitable person. After searching so long for that suitable person, I finally found it. The psychic wave that was emitted from the incident in this Yamsk 11, the first until the last information of the Tau wave, it would be her who will receive its vastness. Sending the technological information from the future to the Whispered, it is not from someone unknown. It is her. She will be from now on.”

“Chidori....?”

“Her ‘abnormal luck’, is because she was living in a ‘singular point’. She would be capable of that. Influencing fate. That is why she is not a Whispered. Rather what she should be called, Chidori Kaname is a Whispering. That’s right, the one who would send the Black Technology to make the world in disorder, would be her.”

“She is an honest person” Sousuke emphasized in an irritated tone. “No matter what kind of theory, she would not have a behavior of gladly sending killing technology.I’m not sure about the context, at any rate she is not that kind of person.”

“That is a mystery” Leonard laughed saying that. “Being strong that far, why would a righteous girl interfere with the past? The past that she cannot accept, what would that be? Was it something that happened long ago? Or would it be happening to her? And then, why would she be sending the Black Technology? No, will she send it? Even then, in the first place who was the one

who invented the information that she has? Where is it? Is there another Whispered from the future? Or there isn't? If you want to know that then you have to leave it to chance. What do you think?"

There was a mixed self derision in his inquiring words, echoing from somewhere desolate. The devil descending in front of your eyes, laughing at the works of god that has surpassed his own understanding... drifting about in such eeriness.

"What I know...."

His head seemed to be funny. Leonard's words, his tense and context were in disorder.

But he understood one thing. Chidori Kaname, that innocent girl, it had nothing to do with her own will. With someone else's reasoning she would become a sacrifice in a grand and arrogant plan. That was only it.

"Ultimately, what would you do yourself? What is your objective in fighting us? Retribution against Amalgam, or the opposition of world domination? Stop with that empty slogan. If possible I want to hear a much more simple intention."

"Take back Chidori, returning to the usual life. That's all."

"Impossible."

"That's not so."

"No, it's impossible. Even if I give up, she will be targeted by someone else eventually. Such humans, and ordinary person should be existing in an organization. Even Mithril is suspicious. If the generation changes someday they would start longing for her powers. It is because it's an organization. This is absolute."

"....."

"But if we were to correct the mad history, she will take a life as an ordinary human. No one would target her. Having a calm life, fall in love, give birth, grow old. What you would wish for. This is the only solution."

Speaking of the theory thus far, that should be.

In the corner of his confused mind, something was telling him that “what this man is saying is correct”. But it left out the most important thing. In regards to that solution, why did he have a feeling of rejection?

No, he knew.

If that were to be, he would no longer be in her life. In Leonard’s words, “fall in love”, “give birth”, “grow old”, one by one those words were tightening his heart.

He was not there.

He would not even be able to protect her from afar.

“Then.... it would be meaningless.”

“What a troublesome dilemma. I’m even bothered by it. It’s good that you’re bothered.”

Leonard took an armful of concrete and let it fall on to the lower floor. Sousuke, in the same manner, threw the rubble. In a matter of few minutes, both of them immersed themselves without saying anything. Finally the two of them uprooted the steel frame, with the momentum they cleared the stairs and a large amount of rubble fell in.

The flatness and the hanging dust and smoke cleared, and a large hole passable by one person was finished.

“Oh well, we’re saved” Leonard muttered, and dove willfully through the hole.

Although his back was defenseless, he didn’t have the mood to attack. Sousuke later followed and the two of them safely emerged on top of the floor. From the stairs there was a “T” junction on a narrow passage.

The truce ended there.

The two mutual enemies took a few steps from each other, confronting each other in the darkness.

“Well then, shall we return to killing each other?”

“.....?”

There was no worry of catching fire there. Guns and explosives could be used.

To take him down, it should be then.

If it were a showdown in AS, even with the Laevatein he didn't know if he would win. But if it was flesh and blood there were prospects of victory. If he did not defeat him then, that man would definitely become a great threat.

“Alright. By all means.”

On the side with a dim light where dusts were fluttering, Leonard Testarossa was laughing.

It was not a pretentious smile.

As he was then, he was glaring at somewhere. Immediately gazing at him, he was expecting conflict. There was not even a particle of tenacity to the present world; it was the laugh of a religious fanatic.

Sousuke, suddenly, was caught wondering if he could win against that opponent.

By no means was it fear. Only, the killing intent towards the enemy that was inside of him previously was no longer there. That was the result of listening to Leonard's words; it produced a hesitation inside of him.

If ever-- if ever there was a possibility to implement Leonard's plan, wouldn't it be the best course to let Kaname return to a peaceful world? To kill or wound this man, would it end that path?

I don't care what happens to me. Chidori. Why are you not here?

At the end of the short hesitation, Sousuke said.

“Right now.... let's stop.”

“Fine. Then for our mutual frustration, why don’t we let those feeling out some other day?”

Turning his back, Leonard left Sousuke. It was a defenseless back. There was still time for a surprise attack. That was probably the last opening.

But Sousuke couldn’t move.

Leonard’s form disappeared into the darkness. He could no longer be aimed at.

“Let me tell you this last. Even if I turn the whole world against me, I will accomplish my objective.”

His voice echoed in the passage.

“You can do nothing and become a spectator. But the next time you show yourself in front of me, there will be no mercy. I will kill you with all my might”

Sousuke could not answer back.

Standing still and dejected, not knowing where his enemy went, the sound of footsteps disappeared to far away.

Change the world?

Becoming calm alone, he suddenly did not believe. He was currently half-believing half-doubting; that must be the proof of his own character’s preservation.

However, there was still one important task remaining.

“Chidori....”

If she were somewhere in the ruins he had to find her first before the enemy did.



Kaname and Tessa went through the hatch of the dome, proceeding in the narrow passage.

Lemon was left behind outside of the dome. He was with them entering it, or so they thought.

Déjà vu. Déjà vu. Déjà vu. The endless repetition of their thoughts.

Drawing close to the center, there was a feeling of pressure and fatigue.

Even though it was almost five meters away. Why was that goal, the small room inside the dome, that far? No matter how much advancement was made the end would not come. Even thought the summit could be seen, the summit couldn't seem to be reached, it was that desperate feeling when climbing a mountain. Those were shared by the two.

Hand in hand, hearts connected.

I'm scared. Do your best. Just a little more.

It's hard. Painful. Don't give up.

But, what now?

It was not distinct as to who was reprimanding and who was complaining. Threading on a few meters for an eternity of travel, the two girls reached the center of the dome.

"This is...."

In the deepest part of oldest TAROS was a corpse with a large amount of electrodes surrounding it.

In a container like a large bath tub a number of cables and pipes were connected. In the center of the container a corpse like a mannequin was stationed upright.

A girl- a young one at that.

It was not decayed, a skeleton, or like a mummy. It was closest to a wax figure.

It had a material feel like cloudy ice. The corpse had preserved its glossy luster. A rich breast and slim waist line was

perfectly preserved. It had a feel to it like it was a varnish on the dead- like something coming out of a fantasy, a smooth curve.

The corpse was close to a sculpture.

The face still couldn't be seen. Surrounding the head of the "sculpture" was countless electrodes and an extremely large helmet-like shape. The head of the deceased was accurately placed in the center of the dome. It must have been for the accuracy of the experiment.

"Who is that?"

Kaname and Tessa opened their mouths at the same time, asking the question and answering at the same time.

"The subject 18 years ago. Although I do not know who it is."

"Then, why are the remains in this state?"

"No. The remains perished long ago. What is in here is the remains of her existence. With long months and years, her mind manifested itself in the physical world through this form, the Omni Sphere."

It was an icicle-like cave. The power that remained in that space, those molecules were one by one being constructed.

That was the remains of time.

That crystal- her remains were the Whisperer. There was nothing there but the power it held, someday- that's right, in an unknown future, she would be revived. Controlling with greater power. No eternity. 10 years? 100 years? Unknown. An unknown amount of time.

"Make preparations—"

From the bag in her hands Tessa took out plastic explosives. Plugging it into the electronic detonator she placed it on the foot of the sculpture. Stretching the cord from the reel she connected it to the firing mechanism.

“Blow it up?”

“Yes. I’m going to destroy this place.”

That was her objective. That sculpture that was emitting psychic waves- That Crystal formed a catalyst. Making the Tau waves reaching from another period convert and transmit the high energy Iota waves. Its effect was Michael Lemon losing his sanity. If it were to be destroyed then Yamsk 11 would be released from its curse. There was no prevention from having the same crystal being brought up again, but it had to be destroyed every time.

No-

That itself was a large contradiction, was it not a wasted effort?

The appearance of the Whisperer couldn’t be stopped. It was eternity. Then-

There was a voice.

You fully understand don’t you, my daughter. You’ve finally come.

It was a familiar voice. From long ago.

That’s right. I have been waiting for you to come. Even now, I have been calling you many times. And every time you resisted, your ears rejecting my voice.

But this has been decided. You are here. You can no longer refuse me.

Receive it. My power. Accept it. My soul.

If a God exists, then we are that existence. You are the entirety of the three Moirae. Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos.

There is no longer need to fear.

Reach out your hand. Open your heart.

With great joy, hold on to your heart the infinite joy.

That’s right. We are always like that. Hesitation is a waste of time.

“Kaname-san!?” Tessa called.

When she noticed, Kaname was standing in front of the created “sculpture” in the center of TAROS.

“We’re going to destroy that. Please stand back!” Tessa warned her, gripping the detonator of the explosives.

“Destroy....?” Kaname mumbled as if in a fever.

The reverberation inside her cranium sometime ago, somehow, had distinctly vanished. Those déjà vu no longer came. Her field of vision was becoming clear. Like the refreshing feeling of having your nose unclogged.

“The need to destroy it is no longer.”

“Eh?”

Separating from the sculpture, she walked to Tessa’s side. What would she do, she did not know. Pulling on the chest of a perplexed Tessa, she snatched the detonator. The surprised girl stretched and pushed, throwing the detonator.

“What are you-”

Quickly snatching the gun hanging on Tessa’s belt, she slapped her cheeks. Grabbing on her collar while staggering, she pulled with all her strength.

“.....!”

“Let’s go, Tessa. There’s nothing we need here.”

The Whisperer behind Kaname built up a sound and broke up into pieces.

Chapter 5: Shooter of Magic Bullets

The interior of the underground institution was being influenced by the expansion of enemy soldiers and Sousuke headed to the deepest part.

If Kaname had safely evaded the enemy she would be heading to the deepest part and would emerge from the opposite exit. It would be the same for Tessa. Heading in the same direction himself, the probability of the two of meeting was not low.

It was difficult to proceed in the underground maze without a map. All he could depend on was his compass and intuition. And his enemies were not stupid; they would eventually discover Kaname and Tessa. No, they might already have been captured.

He had to hurry.

Also, because he was in danger of being discovered by the enemy himself, Sousuke made double time and proceeded on through the complex passages and stairs. The footsteps and light of the Maglight no longer mattered. He had to push it and look for the girls.

Proceeding in such manner, having not bumped into the enemy in a place like that was really good luck.

Then he came into what seemed to be a hall in the deepest part of the underground institution. A wide space.

While walking a few meters, he discovered a man leaning on the wall.

“Lemon....?”

Without taking notice of the surroundings he rushed over to Lemon. Shaking his shoulders, he made a groan.

“Sousuke...”

“Lemon. Why are you in a place like this?”

“I should also ask that. Well....a lot of things happened. Kaname-san and Testarossa-san are together. Aah...my head hurts. I want to throw up.”

An indistinct voice. He looked like he was suffering from a hangover.

“Together? Those two are also safe?”

“Aah. They’re right over there-”

In the stretch of the center of the hall was a giant dome-like installation.

“-They’re in there. I don’t know why. I was also with them, but the inside of my head went crazy.... and I wasn’t able to go forward. How shameful.”

“Wait. Look.”

Kaname would soon be beside him. With only those thoughts, he stared. But when he tried to rush to the dome, Lemon was grabbing his arm restraining him.

“Don’t, Sousuke.”

Another déjà vu came. How many times was it that time? Sousuke, feeling irritated, shook off his arm, but Lemon was grabbing his arm firmly and wouldn’t let go.

“Over there is.... strange. If you go near your head would become strange.”

“What was that?”

“I don’t understand the full details, but only those girls can. Probably, if you’re not a Whispered...”

“If not a Whispered....?”

Sousuke felt a chill looking at the dome the two went into. The arrangement of the block unit’s form had the feeling of supernatural drifting.

It was a godsend that no enemies were present, but it was unknown up to when such luck should be depended upon.

In that giant hall they might eventually be happened upon by the enemy. They couldn't be slow.

"Chidori! Are you there!?" Sousuke called at the dome.
"Did you hear me!? This place is dangerous! Come out!"

Even then, there was no reply. Because that was a silent place there was no way that it was not heard. Of course there was worry that the enemy might have heard his voice-

No, there was movement.

Sousuke grew impatient and rushed off to the dome; from the entrance the shadows of two people could be seen. It was Kaname and Tessa. They were close together, and heading his way.

Thank goodness, they're alright- he let out a sigh of relief.

It had been roughly nine months since he had seen Kaname, and there seemed to be no change. She was wearing tight jeans and a turtle neck sweater. She had impressive long black hair.

Although she was a little skinny, there was no mistake. It was her.

They finally met. Finally made it that far.

There were many things he wanted to say. All of those restrained feelings were exploding without limits. What would be his first words when they re-united? He was angry at himself for not thinking of it. He would say everything that he couldn't say. No, more than those words, first he would run swiftly and embrace her. He strongly thought of that.

He put his foot forward.

He was dangerously close to the dome, up to where he could jump to it. It would be alright if it was only a little... He couldn't wait any longer--

"Chidori...." he muttered, running forward.

But at that time, Chidori pointed the gun in her hand at him, a fired without an ounce of hesitation.

"Wha...."

What was happening at that moment, Sousuke could not fully understand.

He was not hit himself. The bullet fired by Kaname hit right in front of Sousuke's foot. A sharp echo and sparks remained and disappeared.

Even then, it was the truth that she had fired on him.

"Chidori. It's me, look carefully!"

Standing to a halt, he called on her with bewilderment. That place was gloomy. Did she misunderstand something and fire? That must have been it.

"Put down that gun. It's already alright--"

Interrupting his words, Kaname fired again. This time the bullet landed much closer to his foot.

"Don't move" Kaname said. With a gentle voice.

".....?"

He finally noticed. Kaname and Tessa were not cuddled together. She was threatening Tessa with a gun, holder her arm behind her back, handling her like a prisoner or a hostage.

"What are you doing, Chidori? What exactly--"

"I told you not to move. If you get any closer, I'll kill Tessa first. That's why I want you not to come close."

"Sorry, Sagara-san...." a hazy Tessa muttered.

Her lips were swelling and bleeding. Was she hit? Impossible, Kaname did?

"I too don't understand much....but, Kaname-san is probably...."

"Don't, Tessa. Don't speak indiscreetly."

"Ah....!"

Twisting her wrist, Tessa made a small shriek.

"What's the meaning of this? It's me, Chidori. Don't you know?"

“Of course I know. It’s been a long time, Sousuke.”

It was not another person after all. There was no mistake it was Chidori.

“I wanted to meet you. Even now, I have the feeling that I want to run into your arms.”

“...then, why are you behaving this way?”

“I have something I have to do, I have important work. Important work requested by Sophia. That’s why I have to go. I love you, but if you get in my way I will have to kill you.”

Sophia? Work? What were those?

“Chidori, stop joking. This is not the place for it.”

“Yeah, I know. It would be good if it was a joke- such emotions, right now you’re desperately clinging, right? I don’t think it’s unreasonable to be bewildered. But show some courage, I want you to accept this. Because, I’m going to take the power to make this world good”

With Kaname’s violent way of doing it, she pointed the muzzle at the temple of Tessa, and with moist eyes she was begging Sousuke.

“Please, Sousuke. Believe me. Let me go. If you don’t, Tessa is going to be killed and you’re going to be killed. I don’t want that....!”

“Don’t say something you don’t understand. Put the gun down and let her go!”

“Why don’t you understand!?”

Kaname suddenly hit the side of Tessa’s head with the butt of the gun. Staggering and seemingly fainting she brought her up grabbing on her braids, then she said.

“No! I will decide what I will do! I won’t let anyone control me! Even if it’s Sousuke, only that is unforgivable!”

“Chidori....!?”



There's something I have to do, it's important work. I mean, because doing so will lead to the power to make this world better

It was inconsistent.

She had been feeling it the other day, something hot inside her chest disappearing. What captured her in its place was a chill that she had never felt before- an ominous feeling that was no imagination. That voice, that vocabulary, that manner of speaking.

Even though it was indeed said to be Kaname, the behavior was really contradicting. It felt like it was some sort of machine imitating her. After hitting a non-resisting Tessa, why disgorge such language?

Dragging along Tessa, Kaname walked towards the exit. There was no way to shoot her to stop her in her tracks.

“Wait, where are you going?”

“You like me right? Then don’t come after.”

“Could you at least explain!? Do you know what you’re doing!?”

“Of course! So don’t come nearer!”

“Return to your sanity, Chidori-”

Sousuke made a long stride heading towards her.

It was no joke. After going that far would he see her off just like that? Would she shoot Tessa? Would she shoot him? It was a bluff. She couldn’t possibly do those things. Jumping off towards her like that, he should seize her. It may be a little violent, but it was in a situation like that. It couldn’t be helped. If he did that they could escape immediately, then talk about the circumstance slowly later-

“Sousuke....!!”

Gunshot.

Kaname shot Tessa in the head.

The 9mm bullet opened a big hole in her temples, scattering her brains on the other side of her head. Tessa’s body, in an instant, made a crumpling motion and collapsed.

A large amount of blood was spreading on the floor. There was not even the sound of her crying out. It was an instant death.

“Te.....”

Tessa. Impossible.

Aiming at a frozen Sousuke, again she aimed the muzzle.

“I told you! You can’t come!? That much- I told you that much not to come! You killed her! Why did it turn out like this!?”

How can this be? Do you understand? You have to make her stop....!

No more thinking. Inside his head was completely white. At any rate, he had to capture Kaname. Sousuke rushed full force towards her.

“It’s your fault!”

Kaname shot. There was no hesitation.

He felt a heavy impact on his chest. Shortness of breath. Again she shot. Two shots, three shots, one after another. The bullet proof function of the AS pilot suit barely managed to defend against the bullets.

“Chidori....”

Unbelievable.

Staggering to a halt, she firmly held the pistol with her two hands, and aimed at his defenseless head.

“Sto-”

“Good bye, Sousuke.”

She smiled. Discharge.

The flame of the muzzle was the last thing he saw. The bullet hit immediately above his forehead. With part of his brain blown off Sousuke instantly died in that place. He didn’t even have the chance to shout one last expletive.

There was a long silence in the darkness, and nothingness. Aside from that, an empty world arrived.

No-

There was a voice from somewhere.

Don't worry. But, don't be reckless.

I'll definitely wait for you, so don't worry.



He could see a small light in the darkness.

“U...Uaaaah!”

One point of his narrow field of vision suddenly expanded, he let out a scream and raised his body. A terrible growling sound leaked out from his throat. He was angry, sad, and miserable, and his heart was being gripped by a fear like an eagle's claw. All his muscles experienced a violent mental strain.

“Sousuke!?”

Lemon looked at him with an expression mixed with dread and weariness.

That place was the hall. When did he collapse? Lemon was squatting by his side. Five meters away Tessa was lying down. No wounds could be seen in her head.

She was not shot...? Did she only faint?

In that place there was no trace of Kaname.

“Not....dead?”

He touched his forehead. No injury.

He patted his chest and stomach that were supposedly shot. There were no traces of being shot.

“What happened....? Also....where's Kaname?”

“She....went away. When you rushed over to her, you suddenly lost consciousness and fainted.”

“Me...?”

“She thrust away Testarossa-san and ran away. With this foot I couldn’t chase after her, I couldn’t do anything....probably.”

Why the pathetic confidence in his voice? He also seemed to be in disorder. Sousuke took a breath and stood up, and rushed over to the collapsed Tessa.

Aside from being knocked out there were no other injuries. Of course it was the same for traces of being shot. Although it was a blessing that she was safe-

“Just now you said ‘Probably’. What do you mean?”

“I saw you being shot to death. Testarossa-san and you... by her. But it was a hallucination. Possibly....damn, that déjà vu. Thinking of what we have talked about so far, that may have been the ‘possible future’. Kaname-san happening to be violent, that was what we saw. Even though the déjà vu has been quickly disappearing as of late. Why is that?”

He was right. Sometime ago, that déjà vu was gone. Just before, when he entered the hall, it should have been attacking them like raging waves breaking into the shore.

“Chidori....”

Sousuke unsteadily walked toward the exit of the hall where Kaname supposedly disappeared to. He had to chase her right away.

Something’s wrong with her. If not, she wouldn’t have shot me.

“Wait, Sousuke. It’s already been three minutes. It’s useless to chase after her.”

“Let go....!”

Lemon was restraining his leg with his hands, Sousuke shook it off.

“Be calm! We have to control the scattered pieces here.”

“S...she’s sick. She must have lost her sanity-”

“Look out!”

Lemon jumped at Sousuke. The two of them tangled and fell, at the same time bullets burst open from their surroundings.

“.....!!”

Violent bullets echoed into the hall. Enemy soldiers were firing from the exit at the south side. Their distance was roughly around 100 meters. Their numbers were unknown.

“They finally found us.”

Being upset, their vigilance was sluggish to the lowest level. Sousuke smacked his lips at his own foolishness and returned fire with the carbine gun. It was not difficult. From his position, it was dark and distant. A state the enemy could not define from their positions.

“Let’s run away.”

Firing with one hand he made covering fire, releasing an incendiary grenade. There was a flash and an explosion. Obstructing their space, it created a strong wall of flame and smoke. With that the night vision apparatuses and infrared would be useless.

Going through with his injured leg, Lemon helped raise Tessa. Sousuke rushed to the two of them, carrying Tessa on his shoulders, and headed to the nearest exit of the hall.

“Hurry!”

There came shots from another direction. The hall was encircled.

“Lemon, do you know the direction?”

“Here.”

Getting out from the hall Lemon guided them into a passage. Reaching a “T” junction Lemon hurried to the north. Standing to a halt, he called to a hesitating Sousuke.

“What are you doing!? The enemy’s coming!”

Sousuke was looking in the opposite direction from Lemon. Illuminating with the Maglight, there were footprints in the newly dust-covered floor. Kaname's footprints. If he went immediately, alone, he might be able to chase after her with full speed.

"Sousuke!?"

Leaving Tessa and Lemon, and chasing after Kaname? In the direction that she disappeared, there was no mistake that there would be enemies deployed. Chasing after her from there would be reckless. From the way that Leonard spoke, at least he would not kill Kaname. Then only for Tessa and Lemon, it might be impossible for them to escape. Tessa was useful for information, but there was no mistake that Lemon would be killed.

However, Kaname. Finally meeting her-

"Damn!"

Reason had a narrow victory over emotions.

Sousuke shook off his strong lingering affection, turned his heel, and ran towards Lemon.

Going on like that, unreasonable chasing would only result in dying in vain. At that moment he had to think about the escape of the three of them as a priority. There would be another chance to rescue Kaname, it would definitely come- he kept telling himself.

"Would it be alright here?"

"Probably. Above the stairs at the north, looks like we will exit on the other side of the plant."

From the corner of the passage he scattered bullets, aiming at the enemy whose face appeared. As much as possible he tried to restrict them from going forward, Sousuke and the others headed to the backdoor of the underground institution.



Whatever she did, Kaname intended to know what it was. Sousuke had been killed. Tessa had also been killed. Surely she shot them herself- was what she thought. Poor Sousuke and Tessa. Thinking about them, her chest hurt.

That itself was a hard sadness, but there was no longer the need for those two. A very thin friendship, and a fated lover, what would come about in its continuation? After all, their world, in the not so distant future, would be restarted.

What happened or whoever died no longer needed to be worried about. Ultimately, it would be fine as long as she herself lived.

First she had to know the situation.

Amalgam's Leonard Testarossa. That man would surely accept things. He would definitely make preparations to proceed. If it was her previous self, or merely ten percent of her former self, she would have outright refused, with all her strength, any request for that man's collaboration.

However, right then it was different.

She finally understood. It was a really simple method of solution. And errand was entrusted to her by Sophia. Being the only person who could save the world, she finally comprehended. Thinking only of the mission's supremacy and magnificence filled her chest with hotness.

Walking alone in the wide passage, a man was waiting.

It was Leonard. In an old pipe chair left behind in the middle of the passage, he sat with both his legs together.

"Did you wait?"

"No, not really."

Leonard made a complacent smile.

"You're finally awake."

“Un. Sorry to have kept you waiting.”

She returned the smile. Stepping forward with elegance, she stood and grabbed his nape with both her hands.

“Did you make the preparations?”

“Just a little more. It was proceeding for half a year.”

“Then let’s go.”

“Where to, my lady?”

“I’m a little cold.”

Leonard took off his red coat, and hung it on Kaname’s shoulders.

“Thank you. You’re kind. You won’t be violent anymore?”

“Since there is no longer the need. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes. I won’t say anything selfish anymore.”

There was no need for a quarrel.

The two of them walked towards the passage where the subordinate soldiers were waiting.



Due to the rough carrying, Tessa regained consciousness earlier than expected. At first she looked uncertain to be on her feet, but she completely rethought and insisted on walking on her own.

“Are you alright?” Lemon pushed his concern.

“Yes. Your injuries are much worse than mine. Anyway, Kaname-san....”

“She went away. She left us behind” Sousuke said, hastening towards the exit. “I don’t know the reason but she’s not in her right mind. Exactly what happened?”

“About that...” Tessa hesitated.

“Explain! What happened to her!?”

She felt a strong irritation. Raising his voice on her while holding her thin shoulders, Tessa was suddenly surprised. He was looking with an expression mixed with regret and resentment.

“....I’m sorry, Captain. That.... I’m confused.”

“It’s alright. I’m also the same.”

“Before coming here I met Leonard. It seems that he knows something. Even if he gives his hand, Chidori naturally went to that deepest part- and then met with the ghost.”

“That’s right.he has that conviction.”

“About what?”

“Her doing such things. I did not expect it. Besides, even now I still can’t explain well. Inside the center of that institution, was the ‘Shadow’ of the test subject of TAROS that was involved in an accident 18 years ago. The psychic wave that travels from the future and the past created a crystal that passes the consciousness of the Omni Sphere. That crystal is the true form of the Whispering. The existing relay antenna that relays information to us. In order for me to destroy that Antenna, I came to these ruins. If it were not for the Whispering, at this rate, there would be stoppage of the influx of Black Technology from the future that should exist.”

“Leonard called Chidori the Whispering”

“That is so at the moment. I don’t know what kind of method, or what kind of work- I really don’t know. Even as to why her...”

Listening to that harsh reality, Sousuke already understood the meaning in her words. Although he didn’t know the detailed theory, whatever happened, he imagined what she would be doing.

“Was her mind possessed? By that Whispering?”

Tessa did not affirm or negate. She only walked forward, shaking her shoulders. A voice was trying to squeeze out of her throat.

“I’m sorry...”

Regret and shame, and then a deep feeling of guilt. Those seemed to be tormenting her at the same time.

“I didn’t take notice. If I had know this would happen, I would not have let her near, by any means.... all of it, is all my fault.”

There were no words of comfort.

Even then, what can happen?

If you didn’t follow, she wouldn’t.

Right then Sousuke was trying his best to suppress the impulse to blame Tessa. That was already known. Tessa no longer said anything. Coming like that, she already knew that excuses or apologies would be useless.

Unable to bear the awkward silence, Lemon comforted her.

“You’re mistaken, Testarossa-san. Not noticing and being useless would be me. Besides, it was inevitable that nobody could expect.”

“Thank you. But, we can’t put it together” Tessa answered with a hollow voice.

I’m the worst, Sousuke thought. Why did he not encourage her? Why didn’t he say “it’s not your fault” like Lemon? Even though he committed countless mistakes, he could not stop his anger.

I know.

It was all about her.

Understanding that much, he couldn’t cut off his attachment.

Proceeding in the dark passage, Sousuke muttered in a small voice that nobody heard.

“Chidori....”

Just a little more.

The next time we meet, at that time what shall I do?



Wireless communication entered into the ears of Kalinin.

“This is Alpha Leader. Three enemies spotted at limits F3. Two males, one female. We lost visual upon combat. No dead. One injured. Currently in pursuit.”

From the subordinates who finally reached the deepest area, it was a report about failing to catch Sousuke and the others. The “one female” was most likely Teletha Testarossa.

“Continue pursuing. Don’t suppress them unreasonably. You can go slowly. If possible do not kill the girl. She is information.”

“Alpha, roger.”

The wireless communication mixed with the sound of gunfire was cut.

Even with the use of a relay device the communications was bad. Moving a ten odd men squad under the underground maze was an operation that could break bones. Additionally, for a while, it was mixed with the difficulty of the soldiers when they got nearer to the deepest area.

There was no other, it was because of that unknown déjà vu.

Aside from the soldiers losing their minds there were no injuries. The hindrance of the communication and cooperation of every unit had enough problems. Once an order was issued they would continue on, and those who were not able to understand their place and situation were always at the back. Such confusion, the more they proceed to the inside of the institution the more frequently it occurred. In the end there were teams that had nearly

killed each other; there was one act that they were on the verge of if not for Kalinin's warning.

That *déjà vu* had disappeared a while ago.

In the deepest part of the institution, was there something that occurred? That was the conjecture in the corner of Kalinin's thoughts. Most probably, something that he heard from Leonard happened. Chidori was safe from that helicopter crash after all, with such fate being led into the deepest area by her own effort, and then she was there with the Whispering too-

No, don't think too deeply...

Whatever happened, because of that the mutual understanding, each and every team became smooth. Although it was forgivable for the preceding team to let Sousuke and the others escape, the neighboring exit of the underground was already controlled by another team. No matter what kind of skill he excelled in, there was no means for Sousuke to escape alone.

The subordinates would shoot him to death without hesitation. And if Teletha Testarossa resisted, she would meet the same fate.

Will you be alright dying?

No matter how many times he repeatedly asked himself that it was like raising a gooseneck.

It didn't matter. If he died there, that was the end of it. There was no hesitation in his heart; that would be more convenient.

During the raid on Merida Island, his previous characteristics to prepare the location data of emergency supplies in the event of the "worst situation" had surfaced. He had not been able to delete that from the data bank of the *de Danaan*. Leonard's prediction, having knowledge of using the Solar Flare to execute the attack, he was still half in doubt.

The result of that hesitation gave the *de Danaan* the necessary resupply materials, letting them live on thus far.

However, now was different. There was not one ounce of mercy.

Approving the objective of Leonard himself, he decided to work for him, simultaneously erasing his physical unease.

This world shouldn't be like this, that was what he felt.

Andrei Kalinin strongly felt that.

That was why, from there on, whatever happened, he would execute anyone who tried to interfere with their objectives. Even if they were his former allies.

And then Sousuke- you are no exception. If you die here then that is your fate. But if that is not so, if you want to stop me on top of that, you will need resolution. Any humans make confrontations with ultimate resolution and sacrifices.

“Stop!” one of the subordinates beside him shouted, with gun in hand.

From the hanging dust and direction of the darkness, a pair of a man and a woman appeared. It was Leonard Testarossa and Chidori Kaname.

“Don’t shoot.”

There was no strong inhibition. When the form of the two could clearly be distinguished, the subordinate immediately put down his gun. Leonard was in an AS pilot suit, Kaname had a red coat on. They were slowly walking forward. It seemed the confluence had been successful.

However-

What was it, the unnatural composure of Chidori? Was it not like a walk of a monarch that controls the world? For a mere seventeen-year-old girl...

No, it was the truth. She was the monarch.



Fowler and himself took charge of the leftovers of their power like a servant.

“It’s is good that you are safe.”

“Aah. You guys too” Leonard shrugged his shoulders.

“It seems that Sagara and the others intend to escape to the emergency path on the north side. They will be immediately encircled.”

“Sagara?”

Chidori Kaname raised her brow.

“Kalinin-san, You’re mistaken. Sousuke and Tessa were killed by me.”

“What was that?”

“It’s true. Right before my eyes, I shot them in the head.”

This was entirely different from the reports of his subordinates. He was perplexed as to how calmly she would relay Sousuke and the other’s deaths.

“But, my subordinates just now-” Kalinin beginning to say, Leonard brought up his hand.

“No matter, whatever that is.”

“But-”

“It’s alright. Mister Kalium.”

Keeping silent, he abided. Kalinin did not object further.

“...the three unknown enemies are currently being pursued. They will be suppressed soon.”

“Is that so? Then.... do what you wish.”

“Yes.”

“In these irritating ruins there is no longer anything we need. Prepare to withdraw immediately”

“Roger.”

“See you, Kalinin-san.”

Walking calmly from that place he escorted them from behind, Kalinin could feel an unknown omen.

No, not only that, but also a feeling of forfeit.

Kalinin contacted Casper who was standing by above ground.

“Mister Tin. Situation.”

“Still in control. Weber still hasn’t been seen.”

“They will eventually come to rescue Sagara and the others. Next time you see them, remove them.”

“Of course—”

Casper laughed from the communications device.

“—this will be fun.”



<Gunshots of small arms detected. 11 o’clock. Recognized in E4 (Echo 4).>

After receiving the report of the AI, Kurz muttered in the cockpit.

“There’s activity.”

His M9 was concealed at a site three kilometers Northeast of Yamsk 11. For more than two hours, they had not been detected by the enemy, and were slowly creeping forward and getting closer. By using the ECS and usual camouflage, and suppressing the Data link to the lowest range they were deeply careful to the utmost limits.

Barely getting near the site, Kurz stopped the unit, fixing both arms of the M9 on the exposed rock, measuring the noise from the radius with the Super Sensitive vibration sensors.

There was a reaction.

There were intermittent gunshots in the underground plant. Although footsteps were not detected, there was no mistake that there were hostilities with a difference in power.

There was a specific firing sound- he drew from the mark E4, amplifying the playback.

It was not clear because of the echo, but it was the sound of the Carbine gun that Sousuke had. And the firing rhythm. Although it was unknown to most people, Kurz knew it. That was Sousuke's rhythm.

“That bastard, he's alive after all.”

Snickering, Kurz turned on the voice input.

“Details and distance of E4, estimate the vector.”

<Roger. ...complete. Estimating, direction 261. Distance 1800. Vector 73-10.>

The data was projected on the digital map that was magnified on the screen.

The depth was unknown, but Sousuke was moving towards there. He was running double time, firing at the enemy. If he was alone then he would be running faster, it was natural to think that he was with an injured person or a girl. It would be good to think that he was with Tessa.

They were coming out from the opposite side of the plant.

But that was bad. One squad of enemy had already surround from the underground institution of Yamsk 11 to the neighboring exits in the mountain ridges. If there was no support from Kurz, it would be impossible to escape. The enemy also predicted that, it was natural— Casper was moving somewhere on his own, waiting.

He captured the weak electromagnetic wave of his allies.

“Ur...to..z6.ruz7 to.....6”

Because of the bad electromagnetic wave, digital noise was coming in; but there was no mistake that voice belonged to Sousuke.

“...this is Uruz 7. Can you hear me?”

“This is Uruz 6. Situation.”

Dispensing of frivolous talk, he responded concisely. There were no pass codes or concealment of the transmission sources. Then again, the electromagnetic wave coming from there was in the lowest range.

“Escaping from the under.... of the plant. Curre... passageway in 32a-71a. Engaging....enemy heading to West Northwest. With Tessa (Ansuz) and Lemon..... Lemon is injured. What’s the situation above ground?”

He must have been talking while moving. The next electromagnetic wave was stronger.

“Expect enemy at the perimeter 33c-70a. Roughly one squadron.”

“Can support be made?” Sousuke asked immediately.

If he could observe, he judged that he could attack.

“Possible, but the Lambda Driver equipped AS is hiding somewhere. A sniper. There is a need to take care of it first.”

To start the support of Sousuke and the other’s escape, Kurz would compromise his position and fall prey to Casper. In other words, if Kurz did not take care of Casper, Sousuke and the others could not escape.

“Not only the sniper. There is the possibility of Leonard’s unit coming out.”

The unit that had so heavily damaged the Arbalest in Tokyo might be there. Somehow Tessa’s brother was alive. No matter how you looked at it that was a harsh situation.

“I understand. But the first threat is that sniper. If we can at least destroy him, we can somehow send the Laevatein to you.”

That would put Gebo 6 into danger. First, he had to stop Casper’s AS; then, he had to completely remove the enemy that was ready to ambush Sousuke. At the same time, Gebo 6, in invisible mode of the ECS, would drop the Laevatein in front of Sousuke. Just before Leonard reacted.

It was unknown whether Leonard’s unit could be defeated or not, but as long as the Laevatein moved an escape path might open up.

“Roger. We will hold in the exits as much as possible. Good luck.”

“Aah. Just wait.”

After replying, Kurz could feel his heart palpitating.

Me? That Casper?

Can this be done?

But, if he did not, Sousuke and the others might end up in the other world....



In that one day, it couldn’t be guessed as to how many stairs they went up and down.

He was adding fire to the enemy that were chasing them, lending a shoulder to a suffering Lemon, and climbing up the stairs and firing. And then repeating that.

“Kurz and the others seem to be safe. For the meantime.”

“Eeh”

Opening the digital map from the handheld computer terminal, Tessa nodded.

“There are data coming from his unit right now. It’s the situation of the enemy soldiers waiting above. What can be discovered is one squadron.”

Tessa looked at the optimum magnification in the digital map. As far as he could confirm there were eleven. At any rate it revealed the enemy soldiers captured by Kurz’s passive sensor.

Sousuke objectively judged.

If they went up the stairs like that, they would eventually reach the emergency exit constructed at the slope of the hill. Outside that emergency exit were numerous residences, and those soldiers were scattered to such residences.

They were in a fan formation enveloping the emergency exit where Sousuke and the others were supposedly coming out.

With the weight of their own injury, if possible they would capture them alive. If not, the enemy from the outside would simultaneously come in and make a pincer attack.

In any case, it was certain that if they went out there would be concentrated firing from ten people the moment they showed their heads.

Additionally, their opponents were Kalinin’s subordinates. Their aim was accurate, and there was no mistake that it was controlled.

“It’s impossible to break through.”

Tessa and Lemon were no amateurs. They were not distracted from Sousuke informing them of the situation.

As long as there was support from the M9 standing by above, escape was possible. Kurz would drive bullets into the surrounding residences, more than half of the enemy would be powerless. And then smoke and dust would restrict their field of vision. Riding on that confusion the Pave Mare would close in at full speed, dropping the Laevatein. It would not take more than

twenty seconds for Sousuke to get on. With the Laevatein's current power, he could at least gain a few moments if Leonard was his opponent- possibly.

There was only one method for an ordinary AS like the M9 to defeat a Lambda Driver equipped unit, to abruptly attack the enemy. To stop him on the first shot, then it would be over. In a manner of speaking, the Lambda Driver equipped unit was rather strong.

“How long will the ammunition last?” Tessa asked.

Even her voice was tired.

“In economy mode, about five minutes.” Sousuke answered, switching the selector of the carbine gun from rapid-fire to single shots. He then took the out pistol from his holster, turned it, and handed it over to Lemon. Even though he was exhausted, his shot was better than Tessa's.

“It's a pistol I've used for a long time. Be careful using it.”

“I know.”

“Captain you observe the communications.”

“....eeh”

Tessa didn't even give a single sound of discontent.

They continued through the long and narrow ascending tunnel. There were no more stairs ahead. The three of them staggered, proceeding down the passage in the darkness. Sousuke sometimes would look behind and fire, at that moment Tessa would lend her shoulder to Lemon and hurriedly proceeded forward.

They reached a dead end. Confirming that there were no traps, they kicked open some rotten iron doors. Ahead was a small humid room. It was a room filled with air conditioning devices and a cleaning materials locker. Meeting them was a bulky door, beyond that was above-ground.

“Let’s hold here. Lemon behind.”

“Aah”

The door to the outside could easily be opened. Fresh open air leaked in from the crack. Time had passed from sunset, the outside was completely dark.

“!”

Suddenly there was an impact. The enemy, in battle formation outside the emergency exit, shot. Blinding sparks scattered and attacks fiercely buzzed in their ears. The shooters were shooting from about fifty meters beyond the houses.

They returned fire, preserving ammunition. The enemies were not trying to kill them.

“They’re coming from the rear too!” Lemon sharply shouted, pushing through the passage where they had come from.

“Stall some time! As long as possible-”

Lemon jumped from the bullets flying from the passage, jumping into a small room.

“Damn!”

Lemon fired. Sousuke shot. Tessa crouched in the corner of the small room. There were fierce gunshots and roaring sounds; the tearing sound of metal enveloped the three of them.

The succession of the enemy was high. They could see that they were stalling for time. At that rate, they would run out of patience and their ammunitions would run out. Then they would be suppressed.

“We’re being pincer attacked! Kurz, you done yet!?”



The demand from Uruz 7 passed through right to left.

Even the report from Gebo 4 and 6, and the message from his own unit's AI, Yukari, all of it was passing through his head.

In a battle between snipers, discovering the enemy first was the decisive factor.

As fellows who concentrated in careful camouflage, it was a battle of the nerves that pitted wit against wit, concentration against concentration. There was no allowance to have other problems taking up the consciousness.

In the night vision image and neighboring map in the screen, electrical information, climate condition, all of the data could be seen, conjecturing the location of the enemy.

Where-

What about a heat source?

Even if Casper's unit was equipped with ECS, minimum generator exhaust heat was still present. In the ruins, where there was absolutely no human activity, there was no mistake that there were unignorable traces left. But the images of the infra-red sensors were complexly mixed from blue to yellow, unable to clearly show the location of the enemy.

How about sound?

In the silent ruins, the cooling refrigerant of the Palladium Reactor's engine could be perceived. But all the High Sensitive Directivity Microphones could catch were the gun fires of Sousuke and the others. If the enemy was equally silent like that, it was impossible to detect the sound source after all.

Electrical means?

That was also impossible. It was an obvious story, but the enemy was also not using Radar. Using an active type of anti ECS Radar, it was like turning on a searchlight in the middle of the darkness. And then the "fairy eyes" could not detect the gravitational field of the Lambda Driver. In order to avoid

discovery it was stopped. In other words, if he could finish it with the first shot then it would be a victory.

Where is he-

With the difference in terrain and altitude he couldn't read the enemy. Even Scientific Technology was fucked up.

Think about Casper's location.

He would obviously know about the occurrence of the battle with Sousuke in the Northeast of the ruins. It was the same as him; there was a position where he could give the necessary support firing. That was why he was in the position that would give him a blind spot of Sousuke and the others. Not in the opposite position of the hills.

If that was the case, he would take position at a high altitude as much as possible. There was no mistake. If it was not at a high position, he would not be able to detect Kurz's own position.

Inside the building of the ruins? East side of the plant, in the crevice of the pipes or silos?

There were 10-odd places that he could think of. The elements to be considered were not enough.

The enemy would not observe himself, but also the approach of the transport helicopter. And the possibility of other hidden M9s. That was why he was thinking of taking position in the depths of the plant. That eliminated half of the choices. But it was still not enough.

What about the weight and foothold of the unit? What about the movement route after the attack?

Shooting from a large caliber sniping cannon, the surrounding dust would be swirled up, and it will be difficult to align a second shot. He thought he might be inside a building, but there was the problem of the building construction being brittle and falling apart.

Listing up the other details of the elements thoroughly in his head, Kurz made an estimate.

“Three spots, huh?”

The rooftop of the administration building in the ruins. The giant Lenin Statue in the center. And then the steel pylon rising in the north side of the plant. There were no other options than those.

Next would be his character.

He didn’t like to be showy. Concerning that kind of action, Casper had a steady shooting hand, even from the old days. Hiding in the most obvious places, shooting from the easiest positions. Even if he used the equipped Lambda Driver, he didn’t rely on pressure or luck.

If that were so, he would be on the rooftop of that administration building right?

The foothold was firm, not inconvenient in shielding from the surrounding, and it was a position that could guarantee a wide field of vision. He could immediately react from attacks in a different direction, and it had the easiest supporting position for allied transport helicopters taking off.

However... was he a man that would take a position in a predictable place like that?

“Maximum sight.”

<Roger.>

He magnified the projection of said building. Infra-red rays, Light amplification, Passive electromagnetic wave, he observed with all of the modes, but he still didn’t have confidence. It could be seen if he was there, and it could be seen if he was not there. He observed the other two places with the passive sensor, but it was pretty much the same. If he observed just a little more, he would know-

Which one among the three? Assuming such, it was a battle of intuition from the start.

Casper's a rational sniper- there's no mistake about it. And has a complete knowledge about me. Following the process of thinking thus far, it's naturally predictable.

Then, is he in another place? No, would he even read that?

“Uruz 6, done yet!? It will be bad for Sousuke and the others.”

It was the urgent sound of Gebo 6. They were standing by, hidden in the mountain ridge. If Kurz ignored the request then it would be a failure. In some way or another the feeling of impatience once again became big in his heart.

“Just wait. Just a little more.”

What the enemy had that he did not was an element that would decide victory or defeat.

That was time.

“They're slowly searching for us. There is no need to feel the danger of your allies.” But for Kurz it was different. No matter how skilful Sousuke was there was a limit to ammunition. It was only a matter of minutes until they could no longer resist. Until that time- no, he had to defeat the enemy now.

He had to hurry.

Building in the center, or steel pylon of the plant?

Kurz now pressed those two places as choices. Casper was in one of those two.

In the infrared image of the rooftop of the building, there was an area with a mere temperature that was pea-green high. Even in the summit of the pylon there seemed to be a different pattern. Both concurred to the size of an AS.

Which one? Where is he?

“Uruz 6, hurry!” Gebo 6 demanded.

It was inviting impatience.

The one that had the higher temperature was on the building. In addition, only there did the wind blow unnaturally. Didn't the invisibility of the AS avoid the dance of the dust in the wind? Even the distribution of heat could be seen like a humanoid ready to shoot. No, that must have been it. There was no mistake-

He made a decision. Alignment occurred in an instant.

Infrared mode. 24 times. Manual Control. Range, 3390 meters. Wind speed is 5 knots from the Southeast. Calculation error within 30 percent.

He aimed two meters to the right of the center of the distributed temperature. That was most probably the cockpit.

Casper. I got you, he muttered inside his heart.

He pulled the trigger.

There was a miniature and heavy impact. The 76mm Cannon spout out fire from Kurz's unit, making concentric circles in the surrounding shrubbery. Before his eyes the firearm pipe blew off and dart-like armor piercing bullets cut through the darkness, plunging forward.

Hit.

No-

He could only see concrete smash to pieces. Large amounts of rubble and clouds of dust danced around in the explosion. But there was no AS. The shell only blew off the building.

Then that meant-

“.....!”

Immediately there was an aim from the pylon, it was too late.

What he saw, hanging from the summit of the pylon, was a red unit that had already fired. Awfully slow, heading his way, was the enemy shell.

It had shot.

Casper had immediately discovered his location from Kurz's shot and fired, accurately hitting his unit.

His M9 was in a lying down position. That was why the enemy bullet first entered the M9's head, for humans that would be the forehead. It penetrated the radar, tearing up the engine system and drive transmission system in the back of the head, penetrating from the armor on the upper torso to the cockpit block in the chest. The explosive motion energy and shockwave destroyed the interior electrical machinery and the shock absorption system and spread to the pilot inside. It then advanced to the back of the unit, flying out from the hips, scattering in the air.

Kurz did not even have the time to move his brow and smack his lips.



Cancelling the ECS, and deploying the gravitational field of the Lambda Driver, he was cautious of an attack from another enemy. Confirming that there were no other enemy ASes, Casper reported to Kalinin.

“Mister Kalium. Weber has been brought down.”

“Is that for certain?”

“He was destroyed. That kind of damage would result in instant death.”

“....is that so? Then suppress the resisting enemy on the Northeastern side.”

“Capture the girl alive, right?”

“As much as possible. I don't care if the others are killed.”

“Roger.”

After the exchange of communication, Casper's Eligor kicked the Pylon and jumped to the Northeast.

Even after hearing that his former subordinate was killed there was no sentimentality in Kalinin's voice. Even Casper himself, after saying it, felt no guilt. Rather, he was stimulated with an exaltation without any recklessness.

Weber. How regrettable.

Certainly that central building would be the No 1 choice. If I didn't know that the opponent would be you, I would have also positioned there. But I avoided it. It's because I thought that you would stick your eyes on it. The rooftop of that building, I asked a subordinate to light a small gas burner. In that minimum heat, you're doubt would have been enough.

As was expected, you fell for it.

You didn't have time, right? You were impatient, right?

But it was your miss. Firing a second shot, that must be what you expected in the corner of your heart, right? The most necessary in that instant, did you not have enough concentration? That's right, you decided too early. You should have scrutinized it at least one more minute. Then even I might have turned my head.

How unfortunate, my student. But it was fun.

They say that you have natural talents.

Five years ago, one of the employers brought you along and said you were an "interesting kid". Surely, was it a former Japanese Red Army terrorist? You said you killed him in revenge for your murdered family. Thrown into real battle as a trial, you only saw a portion of it. Observation skill and powers of concentration, and then the power of imagination to project the image of ballistics, you were a rare genius.

That's why you were allowed to enter.

I see, you were a genius. You carefully absorbed the art and wits that were handed down from 200 years of us snipers. In one year—in just one year, you became a shooter that was not comparable in your unit.

However, you were not called “Ghost”.

Operations draft, map comprehension, communication, camouflage, surveillance.... learning the various know-how, rifle and bullets, and then learning the mysteries of ballistics.

But my student. You were not called the “Ghost”.

An instant where all of it unified. The whole creation, confirming the grasping of all things material, the context of time flowing, a moment where you can move the air molecules one by one, before you knew it, it ends. You can say that you have seen God. That happens when it happens.

But ultimately, this has nothing to do with tactics. You would not know that. Because you are like that, the Ghost did not come.

I lent you a hand in your revenge. Instructing you in all of the arts. But, you can only go so far as to walk behind your teacher. Kurz Weber. You are such a blockhead.

My student. How unfortunate.

Casper’s Eligor jumped two, three times, hurrying to the battlefield at the Northeastern part of the ruins.



On the South side Sousuke could hear the consecutive sounds of explosion from somewhere far away. There were two shots of large caliber Sniping cannons used by an AS.

And then- the sound of a unit exploding.

It couldn't be seen from Sousuke's position; if he peeked outside shots were immediately fired. That was why he could only guess, it seemed that the sniping battle ended in an instant, and it looked like one AS was destroyed.

"Uruz 6. Situation."

No response.

"Kurz, respond-"

"The link of the ADM (Advance Data Modem) has been interrupted" Tessa muttered operating the computer terminal. "All the data transfers have been stopped. There is no rescue signal. This indicates the function of the M9 suspended...."

"Was he killed?" Lemon shouted, returning fire in the back.

"I don't know. But, most probably.... he was destroyed...."

"He can't be killed that easily" Sousuke said, shooting at the outside of the small room. "This happens many times. Don't worry"

There was almost no ammunition left. Twenty shots more. After that, it was impossible to suppress the enemy attack.

"Eeh. But, this situation-"

"Don't give up Tessa."

"....."

"There is still something that can be done. He will definitely come get us. Don't whine."

".....yes."

But to crush the patience of Sousuke, the red enemy AS attacked. Right in front of their fort, it landed in the open passage right in front of them. A Lambda Driver equipped unit. An enhanced improved model of a Codarl, an AS that was called Eligor.

It can't be....

Equipped with a 76mm large caliber cannon, it was a sniping type. The sniper that Kurz warned about had majestically showed its presence like that-

“Kurz-”

“Weber-san. It can’t be....”

“Duck!”

The red Eligor brandished its arm, sweeping the small room where Sousuke and the others were hiding. With the worn out concrete wall, the rusted roof shattered to pieces. The form of Sousuke and the others, who barely got away from ducking, was completely visible from the outside.

“Uh....”

Being covered in the fragments of the concrete, Lemon made a weak moaning sound.

“Rescue will not come.”

A man’s voice was coming from the exterior speakers of the AS.

“Kurz Weber is dead. Give up.”

There was no reason to doubt the man’s words. Above all, that sniper had shown himself. That meant that their battle was over.

“Impossible....”

“We’ll save the girl. Hand her over. If you do not follow, it would be unavoidable. You will all get killed.”

Tessa’s eye came together. She had already forcibly suppressed her mental shock. Together with a strong will she made a faint shake of her head with her lips in the shape of “No”.

She would not give up information about her allies; Tessa had already made such things clear to her followers. She herself also wished that. However, if she lived, she would someday be rescued by her allies and had a chance to opposed Amalgam, right?

And then, in some ridiculous way she might somehow end up with Kaname?

With mostly blind hope moving his heart, Sousuke hesitated.

At that time, there was a whisper on the FM band in the wireless portable radio in his ear.

“Sousuke.... can you hear me....”

It was an intermittent weak voice.

It was Kurz. He was alive.

“Aah, I can hear you.”

“What a blunder. The unit is in ruins. Me too.... probably, won’t have long to live.”

His eyes were darkening. That was what he was trying to say about his own body. That must have been it. The M9 was destroyed, and he was fatally injured.

“But.... I can at least make one shot.listen, Sousuke. The pilot of that red AS, somehow....get him outside.”

“Outside? How do I-”

“Do whatever it takes, just do it.”

“.....”

The red AS was looking down. The infantry behind it did not release their caution, but stopped shooting. His carbine gun only had fifteen shots left. And he only had one smoke grenade. What kind of bluff could he make? That sniper whose face or name he didn’t know, how could he make him get outside? That sniper was-

Sniper. That was it-

“...I’ll try.”

Whispering in the wireless radio, Sousuke threw his carbine gun on the ground. Then he took out the knife from his

hips, quickly pulled Tessa by the chest, and pushed her in front as a shield.

“Sousuke!?”

To a surprised Lemon, Sousuke informed him sharply “don’t move”. Behind the remaining building materials, putting Tessa in front of the enemy as a shield, he skillfully hid his body.

Tessa did not make any visible resistance. She had an appearance of looking attentively at the development.

“Hmmm. What are you planning?” the pilot of the red AS asked.

“I want to negotiate.”

“Negotiate?”

“If you want the girl then I’ll give her. But you have to guarantee my safety. If you can’t do that, then I will kill her first.”

“I told you. I was told to capture that girl ‘if possible’. If you resist, killing you together would be unavoidable. That’s your worth.”

“Even then, you can still have her alive. Let me go. If you do so I will hand her over unharmed.”

“Are you an idiot?”

The red AS shook its shoulders, responding to the sarcastic laugh of the pilot.

“Sagara Sousuke, right? I’ve heard of you. Just to save yourself, you will not kill that girl. Stop with the stupid bluff.”

“Whether it’s a bluff or not is not the problem” Sousuke informed them, closely sticking to the body of Tessa. “I still can’t die. I still have to finish what I have to do. Open a path now.”

“And then let you go like that?”

“If you can’t, then just blow us up. Then that’s it.”

How about it....?

Of course you have no intention of letting us go. Just as what was said, you think that it's alright to just blow us up. With that AS it would just be an instant. There's nothing simpler than that.

That's right. It's indeed simple.

That's why you'd hate that choice. Especially this overwhelmingly advantageous situation.

You don't need to give in to the challenge of "through a human shield, in an attempt to only hit me, you can't possibly do that". That is an excessive challenge. Something to stimulate you, this kind of movement would be enough.

Well, What now? With your unit and equipment, you can't kill only me.

"Hmmm...."

Here it comes.

"Oh well. I have heard stubbornness before..."

Here it comes.

A long few seconds passed, the chest block of the red AS made a sharp slide. It was the sound of the cockpit hatch opening. The standing unit was in rigor, the hatch in the back of the head opened.

It was there.

The pilot could be seen inside the hatch carrying a rifle. He was a sunburned Aryan man. With just one look it could be discerned that he was a soldier with a face of long military service. He had big eyes, a wide forehead, and a hooked nose.

"Sagara, was it? Doing such mischief, don't you think this is too much?" the man said from the shoulder of the AS.

"Say what you want. I will absolutely live."

Tessa also had guessed his intention. With the man showing himself, she could feel another kind of nervousness run past her body. All that was left was to wait-

That's right. That was all that he could do.

He no longer had a gun. Only one knife and a smoke grenade. There was no meaning in throwing the knife towards that man on the shoulder of the AS. Before that it would become a bee's nest, that man would become prey to precision marksmanship. Which one would it be?

There was a dull light on the rifle on the man's hand. That was the intention of shooting. Not injuring Tessa as a shield. There was no mistake he would shoot at Sousuke's forehead.

The man made a stance. With ruthless eyes. There were no means of escape.

Kurz.

I did what you said.

But the place where you are at should be very far from here...



1650 meters.

The distance from the target calculated by Kurz Weber from the scope gradations was roughly 1650 meters. Even without the convenience of Laser range finder, or calculations from observation tools, that number should be right.

His body was worn out.

His right foot would not do as he said; his left foot from the knee down was twisted in a strange direction. On the contrary, he did not know how the lower half of his body was still connected. Metal fragments had torn up his back, his ribs were broken and his

internal organs were in disorder. Blood was still flowing from his head; his right ear could not hear anything.

There's nothing that can be done. I will die here.

He already knew that.

However, he was not dead yet. Was there something he had to do? There was only one thing he could do.

That was already decided. The rifle.

Using his two hands that could still move he crawled out of the destroyed M9. Every time he moved his body intense pain attacked him. How far could he go?

Crawling with the weapons rack on the ground, he took out the rifle inside with difficulty. An old Bolt Action Rifle. That thing was also still alive.

Removing the buffer materials, he took out the rifle. And then measured the distance from the scope.

1650 meters.

He couldn't. It was unreachable. If he advanced 400 meters more he could somehow do it.

Inside the scope, Casper appeared from the cockpit of the red AS. Sousuke had done well. But the distance was too far....

He couldn't do it. That was the end.

Sousuke. Sorry. You do something about this later. I can't do it.

Tessa. Give up on that moody man, and find a good man.

Mao, the really lonely Melissa. I wanted to be more affectionate. Will a girl like you cry? What about it? Will I want you to cry, would I want you not to cry? Not embracing you is better after all.

And then Casper.

Surely I'm a repeat student. And a half assed person. Practically, in the end I can't beat you. I wasn't called a "Ghost", and was not able to become a true sniper.

But Casper.

The one shot of that revenge- in the battlefield in South Lebanon, capturing in the scope for my family's revenge- I was not able to shoot. Behind that man, standing on the stairs, there was Lana, who had no relation whatsoever. A girl merely 8 years old. It was clear that if I pierced that man, Lana would get hurt.

You said shoot. It was the first and last chance. But it was impossible for me.

And then you shot.

Aah, that's right. Because of that my prey was dead. The revenge was over. However, it was in exchange for Lana's life. You're "Accurate Ballistics" not only blew off the man's head, it took along her spinal cord and other internal organs.

Even now she is still in the hospital. If it were an ordinary hospital, she would have already died.

You shot knowing everything.

That was why I left. If that is the "true sniper", then I wouldn't want to become a monster like that. That's right, you are a monster. Freak.

Then-

Kurz thought.

Would he leave his comrades like that to him? To that monster? Would he give up and abandon them?

Why don't we try....

There was only one shot. As for the time he would remain conscious, only a little remained. Ten more seconds, or thirty more seconds. The disappearing fire of his candle. Right then, even if he

peeked at the scope, he had a feeling of being swooped down by the deep darkness drawing nearer.

He setup the rifle in the most stable firing position. At most, he couldn't do it in such a posture. He couldn't move his feet.

1650 meters.

A distance that 308 caliber rifle could not reach. In the sniping records, he had never heard of it.

That was even 130 meters beyond the sniping record of Casper.

He glued the stock to his shoulders. Handling the grip, he sunk the lower part of the stock to the ground, stabilizing it. Left hand clinging to the right shoulder, he painstakingly put his upper body into position. He fixed his right cheekbone into the frame, positioning his right eye in a straight line to the scope.

He read the wind. Before it was 15 knots from the Northwest. From the interior was 10 knots North-Northwest. There was also turbulence. He was calculating everything necessary to send in the bullet.

Of course even the temperature and humidity. Air resistance, Combustion speed of the gunpowder, dilation of the gun and bullet, the many connected elements that would greatly influence the ballistics.

How many degrees for the bullet's barrel roll/forward roll? There was also the phenomenon called Tumbling, multiplying it greatly with the distance. Even with the faint barrel roll, there was no mistake that that distance would have great influence.

Then there was a large element. He had to think about the Coriolis that occurred in the earth's rotation. Especially that place was close to 60 degrees north latitude. The effects of the high latitude Coriolis was great. In that situation then there would be 30 centimeters to the east.

And there were many others, and the existence of the detailed problems. Taking all of it into consideration he decided on the final alignment. That was a complex calculation that current computers are unable to perform. Only a human could accomplish that risky attempt.

Kurz entered all the elements into his head, then he clearly forgot it once. What remained was the image of the ballistic.

Being guided only by intuition it was the image of super calculation, super mathematics.

The necessary point- to connect the target who was a number of meters away from the crosshair.

But, that was not enough.

Because of his irregular breathing, the crosshair in the scope rubbed sideways. The mere miscalculation would be fatal. The required concentration was not to put a thread into the hole of a needle. But how the eye perceived a needle drawing the image of a dragon.

There was no reason that aim was possible.

Ordinarily that was how one thought, but floating in the mind of Kurz was another story.

Aah, I can do it....

No surprise nor delight, he was just silently feeling that.

Even reading what cannot be seen. Moving the muscles that had lost their strength. The burning of one's own blood that had already disappeared. He could see the colors of the wind. The image of the ballistic was vivid. He grasped the energy of the surrounding molecules one by one, he could now understand.

He was no longer thinking of the safety of Sousuke and the others.



He was not thinking of Mao. Not even Lana who was in the hospital, nor his dead family, nor the teacher who was his first love during his high school days, of course he forgot everything. On the contrary, he did not even know what kind of person the target was.

Who was that?

No, it didn't really matter. Only to send a bullet there.

That moment would soon come. The supreme instant that would drive the target, the whole life of one's self.

Aah, I don't like this.

Aiming at a farther distance-

What was falling on top of him? The other side of the materials, something unseen. He distorted the surrounding air; the context of time became ambiguous.

Before he knew it, he pulled the trigger.

He shot.

Everything was in accordance to the image. The firing needle falling as followed, the gunpowder burned as assumed, the bullet swelled as expected, revolving in the gun barrel advancing.

The magic bullet flew.

It cut through the air, completely reading the wind, drawing a parabola, like it was being sucked in the fixed position and converging on it.

1650 meters.

He already knew that it hit.

Kurz Weber, with his last thought, "*serves you right*", was holding the rifle tight and fell into the nothingness of darkness.



It struck-

The moment that Sousuke thought it, blood was dripping from the enemy's chest.

From the back to the chest. The bullet had come from nowhere and had actually shot the man's heart.

“Imp....”

He opened his two eyes in surprise. He did not see Sousuke. Turning his shoulder barely with the remaining strength of his muscles, from a long distance, he looked at the distance to where Kurz was crushed.

“.....”

It shouldn't have reached. The man was flapping his mouth, trying to mutter it.

But it reached. Kurz's shot-

The man lost his strength in both legs, falling from the shoulder of the AS.

Kurz-

At the same time, Sousuke moved. With the last remaining weapons he threw the only remaining smoke grenade, holding down the nape of Tessa's neck, he shouted.

“Gebo 6, the sniper has been dealt with! Send A!!!”

“Roger...!” Gebo 6's Captain, Fisher, responded from the wireless radio.

He had already understood the situation. From the side of the mountain ridge he had used ECS and silent mode and was standing by. He was already getting closer to the detecting distance.

If the sniper had become powerless, it was not impossible to drop the Laevatein in a forceful penetration, immediately taking refuge behind it. But within the ten seconds, there was the premise that Leonard's AS would appear-

“Tessa, the Beacon-”

“Yes...!”

In the swirling smoke, there was a need for the allies to pinpoint their location. Tessa crawled and operated the computer terminal, sending a wireless signal of their location.

Recovering from the shot of the AS's pilot, the enemy infantry fired. Bullets were jumping from above their heads. With the firing from the original underground path, Lemon shouted.

“They're coming from the rear! I'm also out of ammo!”

“Do something!”

Without further responding Sousuke crawled forward in the rubble, taking up the carbine gun which he had dropped earlier. It had no more than fifteen shots. The shadows of the enemy charged in the smoke. He shot. One shot did not hit. Another shot made a kill. Then there was an intimidating shot to the succeeding enemy.

“Gebo 6, is it there yet!?” Tessa called.

Then, faster than Gebo 6, a synthesized voice of a man responded on the wireless radio.

<Just a little more, Captain. ETA, Five Seconds.>

“What's this? The cargo hatch on its own—”

<Descending.>

With the sound of the rotor and the roar of the engine, the sound of the AS detaching from the hydraulic bolt echoed at the same time. From Gebo 6 rushing in the air, the Laevatein descended with the best timing. It fired the head machine gun in Full Auto and immediately landed before Sousuke.

<Sergeant, please hurry.>

“Al!”

Leaving the carbine gun, Sousuke jumped from the thunderous roar and burst of smoke. The Laevatein opened the cockpit hatch and held out his right hand. It may not have been more than a second. The Laevatein seated him with the hand, with

a manner of throwing him in the rear of his head block with his right arm.

In some way it had protected the position, sliding him into the cockpit. Without orders the hatch closed. Al proceeded with the start up process on his own. Super Express. Omitting all the check data. The usual setup, the usual master mode, the usual enemy search mode. Like the unit itself was hurrying.

<Alignment wave detected! Two, one.....!>

“.....!”

He jumped.

He had barely avoided the 40mm shell attack from the Southwest. A 40mm shell backed up with Lambda Driver. Leonard’s attack. He must have been attacking from somewhere in the ruins. If Al hadn’t forcibly proceeded with the startup process, they might have been destroyed.

<Enemy AS, 2 O’clock, distance 8. It’s that bastard.>

“Aah, it’s Leonard.”

Twisting his body in the air, he looked at the enemy infantry on the ground with his head machine gun. He had to protect Tessa and Lemon. He poured the 50 caliber shells overhead the enemy squad, with smoke rolling up from the impact.

“Pick up the two.”

<Roger.>

He leaned over to the front of the small room where Tessa was hiding. From the side of the Laevatein the support arms extended, picking up an exhausted Lemon and a confused Tessa. It was too late to call Gebo 6 that had escaped towards the mountain ridge. There was little time to have Tessa get onboard.

Another attack drew near. There were several 40mm bullets. As expected, he had no intention of giving mercy. Leonard was serious.

Carrying the two he evaded the first bullet, taking shelter in the Lambda Driver protective wall from the following bullets. He was just barely able to turn away.

He couldn't have defended if it was nearer. Additionally he didn't have an anti ECS sensor. Leonard's AS was already translucent, and there were no means to detect him-

“Can we use the ‘fairy’s feather’!?”

<Another risky performance.>

“Just do it!”

<Roger....!>

The two extension units equipped in the Laevatein, also named “fairy’s feather”, were deployed with a short slide. The unit’s generator was roaring, giving maximum output. Large electric charges flowed to both shoulders, distorting the exhausted heat in the surrounding.

<Full Power Line maintained. LDC, Charge rising. LBS, contact. First round, startup success. Second round, startup success. Interference radius enlarging. 50, 100, 200....>

On the contrary of its so-called name, the “fairy’s feather” was not a device for flight.

On the basis of the information left on the hard disk Kaname had left in the Mansion in Nickelo, the extension unit that Miller and the others produced was originally called “Lambda Driver Cancellor”. All the functioning Lambda Drivers in the surrounding area of the Laevatein would be rendered inoperative, temporarily.

It was a detailed theory Sousuke absolutely could not understand. The “fairy’s feather” used a larger amount of electrical energy than the Lambda Driver, it was also explained that the Laevatein itself would not be able to use the Lambda Driver.

And then there was another thing.

To finally utilize the effects of the “fairy’s feather” was related to the consciousness of Sousuke. It was the same as an image of a shield defending bullets or as the image of an arrow piercing that gravitational field; he needed to have an image in his head of a “super phenomenon not occurring”.

Such an image could not be imagined at first, but finally Sousuke understood. He only needed to imagine how he used to think.

In other words, “Cheating, such things do not exist”.

Disappear-

In that instant, the “fairy’s feather” reacted to Sousuke’s thoughts. A hundred meters surrounding the area were already invoked by the canceller’s interruption area. In just an instant all the space dimly distorted.

That was the only abnormality.

Nothing occurred after that. Rather, it spoke as the proof of its success. Because the power of the unit was to “not make anything happen”-

“Was it effective....?”

In the front of the Laevatein, roughly in the ruins about 300 meters ahead, swirled a giant cloud of dust. The translucent flying black AS of Leonard came crashing and fell into the building.

It was effective. The enemy had lost the power of his Lambda Driver-

“!”

An alarm sounded. Something from the sky was falling to the ground. Leonard’s unit recovered its position and landed successfully. It stopped its ECS and immediately fired from the ground. He had read that he also could not use the Lambda Driver.

Sousuke made evasive maneuvers, but because Tessa and Lemon were being gripped with the support arms he couldn’t move

recklessly. He didn't have enough power. Because the electrical charge of the unit was being taken by the "fairy's feather", he only had minimum mobility.

"Damn....!"

Sousuke took out the Boxer shot cannon from the Hard Point in his back and returned fire.

He couldn't use the Demolition Gun. It was not an article that could fire the Large Caliber cannon without the assistance of the Lambda Driver.

Additionally, even without the Lambda Driver, Leonard's AS was quick-witted. Moving from shelter to shelter he was adding fire bit by bit. Being cautious from his fire, he would not try to get close and was pressing him with shots.

What now-

<Warning. Abnormal temperature rising in LDC-1.
Interruption area decreasing.>

The left shoulder "fairy's feather" could not stand the burden and was overheating. In the heat of the large electrical power, the cooling mechanism could not catch up.

It would break down soon. It was only a matter of time before the second unit on the right shoulder met the same fate.

If the Lambda Driver Canceller stopped, it would be over. There were currently no means to compete with and overcome Leonard's unit. There was nothing that could be done except to withdraw. Everyone would be killed. Everyone.

<Sergeant. I think you already understand....>

"Aah" Sousuke responded while a returning fire.

If they were to escape, it had to be then.

He should give Leonard's unit diversionary fire and escape with full power, then find Gebo 6 that was currently waiting in the mountain ridge, and escape with full speed-

<There is no means to recover Uruz 6. If we conjecture the situation from the data of the last ADM---->

“Stop it.”

<---He is already dead.>

“Stop it!!”

Nobody would understand. Even now, he may still be alive with a faint breath. If treated immediately, something may be done. He may be saved. Even if I were there sustaining heavy injury I may still live. Who's to say that stubborn idiot, that Kurz, died in a place like this?

Leaving him behind and escaping like that...

How could such a thing possibly be done?

What would he say to Mao when they get back?

<LDC-1, function stopped. LDC-2's temperature is also rising.>

The fuse of the left shoulder finally burned out, losing its function.

There was no time. With the connected position of the digital map on the screen it was ruthless no matter what. All the elements were trying to tell him that nothing could be done.

What Al said was true.

It was the truth.

<Decide. Sergeant.>

Al no longer pressed after that.

He was patiently waiting for Sousuke's reply.

“....withdraw.”

<Roger.>

He made diversionary shots with the Shot cannon on full auto. Scattering all the grenades that he had, he blew them in mid air with his head machine gun. Taking the opportunity from the

enemy, the Laevatein used all its remaining surplus power to leap, crossing the mountain ridge.

Gebo 6, who was waiting at a low altitude, started to accelerate and rise.

Ignoring the usual recovery sequence, Sousuke made the Laevatein grab the bottom emergency hook of the Pave Mare. The Captain of Gebo 6 said nothing and accelerated with maximum power.

Hanging on to the helicopter with one arm, the Laevatein withdrew to the East, away from Yamsk 11.



“They escaped huh....”

After being confident that the interruption to the Lambda Driver had completely disappeared, the withdrawal of Sagara Sousuke with the helicopter far away had ended.

Deciding that it was useless to pursue, Leonard turned his unit.

Although it was possible for him to fly and follow the high speed of the helicopter, he didn't want to risk being affected by that canceller again. His Belial was not a convenient unit that could stand a fall from 1000 meters without a Lambda Driver.

But, a canceller?

Surely the theory behind it was possible, but Tessa being able to complete it was an utter surprise. Even that white and red AS... He had a feeling that he would be at a loss even compared to that Arbalest that he fought before. Speaking from a long distance attack, an attack backed up by a Lambda Driver, that unit barely managed to turn away.

Of course, his predominance had not changed.

He only noticed on route, but that unit might not have been equipped with an anti-ECS sensor. Even with a third generation opponent that used ECS with minimal effectiveness translucency could be cancelled-

Well, whatever.

He would be more prudent in the next battle, perfecting the preparations, and certainly crush him.

“Nevertheless-”

Casper. Making a mistake...

Leonard muttered inside, rubbing his nose and looking at the corpse of Wilhelm Casper collapsed beside the small cabin. Even the red Eligor that he piloted had been destroyed. In the confusion of the battle with Sagara Sousuke the pilotless Eligor had been torn from the bullets.

Losing Casper had dealt a severe hand to him. Fowler and Sabina had suitable skills as pilots, but there was no one who could exceed the shooting of Casper. Doing what he had done up until then, he must have been a capable person who longed for fierce battle.

There was a communication from Kalinin coming out from the ground.

“Airborne troops of the Soviets coming from the Southwest. Most probably around two squads. Shall we engage?”

The Soviets drew near. He didn’t know how the Soviets had sensed the battle in the ruins, but that was unnatural. At any rate, it was their territory.

“No. There is nothing we need here. Hurry and withdraw.”

“Roger.”

“Aah. Also Casper is dead. However it seems the sniper from Mithril’s side was killed. It was your former subordinate, right?”

In quite a small moment, Kalinin fell silent.

“If that is so, it was a serious blow to them. Weber’s talent, it is a bigger threat than Sagara Sousuke’s AS.”

“Does your heart hurt?”

“If it’s a grieving heart, I have already thrown all of it away.”

Leonard and his subordinates quickly recovered the surviving squads into the helicopter and left the abandoned city.

Epilogue

On the way back, after the escape from Yamsk 11, Sousuke did not have the heart to comfort a dispirited Tessa.

Kaname turning her back on him... And then Kurz...

Whichever concern it was, Tessa strongly blamed herself. It was her own mistake. It was her own incompetence. If only she had predicted it earlier.

Nothing could be done.

When some tragedy happens the responsible party cannot blame somebody else. She was the responsible party. If only she was wiser, if only she had virtue. She suffered with thoughts of condemning herself. To such a person, exactly what kind of words could you offer?

The craft's crew prepared a sleeping pill. They forced it on Tessa who said she "does not need it".

Lemon was exhausted, but his life was not in any danger. His wounds were suitably treated by the crew, after that he was fast asleep.

Gripping the hand of Tessa, who was groaning from nightmares, Sousuke was thinking about a lot of things. Omni Sphere. Accident 18 years ago. Whispered and Whispering. Deviated world. And the key to that was the transfiguration of Chidori Kaname.

He could not imagine the method of solving it.

He thought about Kurz.

What was floating in his mind was the form of that enemy sniper dying from the blood gushing out of his chest. Conjecturing the firing range from the digital map later, it was 1650 meters. For Sousuke, who knew a little about sniping, he knew well that it was

an act no human was capable of. Most probably, it was the greatest shot of his lifetime. He had fired with all of his life, saving Sousuke and the others.

Death was a part of man. In the middle of that darkness, Leonard had said it to Sousuke.

In that way, he had to get even.



Turning south, they returned to the *Tuatha De Danaan* situated at the Pacific Ocean. It was 54 hours after they had escaped from Yamsk 11.

After the report, there was a gloomy atmosphere floating about the crew of the *de Danaan*.

Clouseau, who had already returned, said “Good job. Take a rest now” without any persecution. Mardukas was the same, only saying “Good that you came back safely. Don’t worry about the Captain”. They also had experienced their comrades in arms dying.

And then there was meeting Mao...

In the briefing room, without anybody else, only the two of them talked.

At first, she had a calm attitude, listening to the details. When Sousuke was finished explaining, she let out a sigh, and muttered “then, it can’t be helped”.

Then after a long silence, she spoke.

“Did you hear? About us?”

“Aah”

“That so..... well, it was a rebound. Since it was a dry relationship. You don’t have to worry.”

“Is that so?”

“I was just playing. It’s not like it was a rush. Well, it was something to reduce stress. It’s not like it was serious, it’s because it was like this, I should have stayed my distance. That’s why....”

It was a different manner from what he himself and Tessa had heard, rather it was painful.

“Mao.”

“Completely, it was not serious. He’s 6 years younger right? That idiot, lusty man, frivolous....only played with him a little. That’s why...”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t say that.”

It was already the limit. With her looking downward, both arms wrapping around Sousuke’s back, she was desperately pushing back her voice.

“It was not your fault. He was an idiot. That’s all of it.”

“Mao....”

“That idiot. But I love him....”

“I know.”

“You can’t die. Please.”

“Don’t worry.”

His shoulders were soaked with her tears. All of her body was trembling, shivering. Unsuppressed emotions were pouring out. The weeping hit his earlobes. Then, saying nothing more, he could only hold her shoulders.

There was no sadness. He was experienced.

No, was that really so....?

The way of smiling, he thought he had grasped it. But he still could not understand the way of crying. An incomplete human like him, shaking his shoulders, if only he could sob- when exactly would that be?

Chidori.

Why are you not here?

If it was in front of you. If it was in your arms, I might be able to cry.



Traveling by air was not bad.

In the cabin of a business jet, burying her body in the comfortable chair, that was what Kaname thought.

Surrounded by a robust bodyguard and an obedient attendant, enjoying first class food, watching a favorite movie... Having relaxed like that, it had really been a long time. How long ago was it? She did not know.

Sousuke and Tessa were dead. She also heard that Kurz Weber seemed to be dead.

What a pity. That had to happen in a useless fight.

Without doing anything, you should have left everything to me. If you had done that, everything would have been better. There's no need to worry about the troublesome matters. You could have lived, enjoying every day.

“Miss Chidori. Is there anything you need?”

From inside the cabin came Sabina Refunio. She had joined up when the transfer was made to the business jet. She had to do something boorish in South America.

“Hn. Nothing in particular. But, that's right.... I want to get into a large bath.”

“That is expectedly impossible inside the aircraft. However, we may have it prepared when we land.”

“Is that so? Then an Onsen would be nice.”

“Onsen?”

“A Hot spring. Until you have that prepared, I’ll be easy going. An open air bath. Having everyone going in would be best. Speaking of which, it’s been a long time since I’ve been to a hot spring-”

From the image of the fun memories, she gradually got carried away. Carrying an armful of uncertainty, having fun from the bottom of her heart, those nostalgic images surfaced.

When she went into a hot spring, when was that? Who did she go with? Whose idea was it, and who had made such an uproar?

“.....?”

At that time, without relation to her own will, she felt something hot on her cheeks. Hot liquid was pouring from both her eyes. Without significance to her, it flowed. She thought it was completely mysterious.

“Miss Chidori....?”

“How strange. This isn’t supposed to be a situation like that. Well anyway. We’ll be landing soon right?”

“After fifteen minutes.” Leonard said coming from the pilot room. “It’s about time, why don’t you look at the port side? Today’s weather is good.”

“Which?”

Kaname bent herself forward, peeping outside of the aircraft window.

Beyond the hazy atmosphere, in the ocean reflecting the shining sunlight, a lonely half-moon shaped island floated. She remembered that island.

“It’s being constructed there?”

“That’s right. For you- and a sacred temple that will save us. At any rate, that design will be discovered, and many enemies will be coming. We have to prepare for that coming attack.”



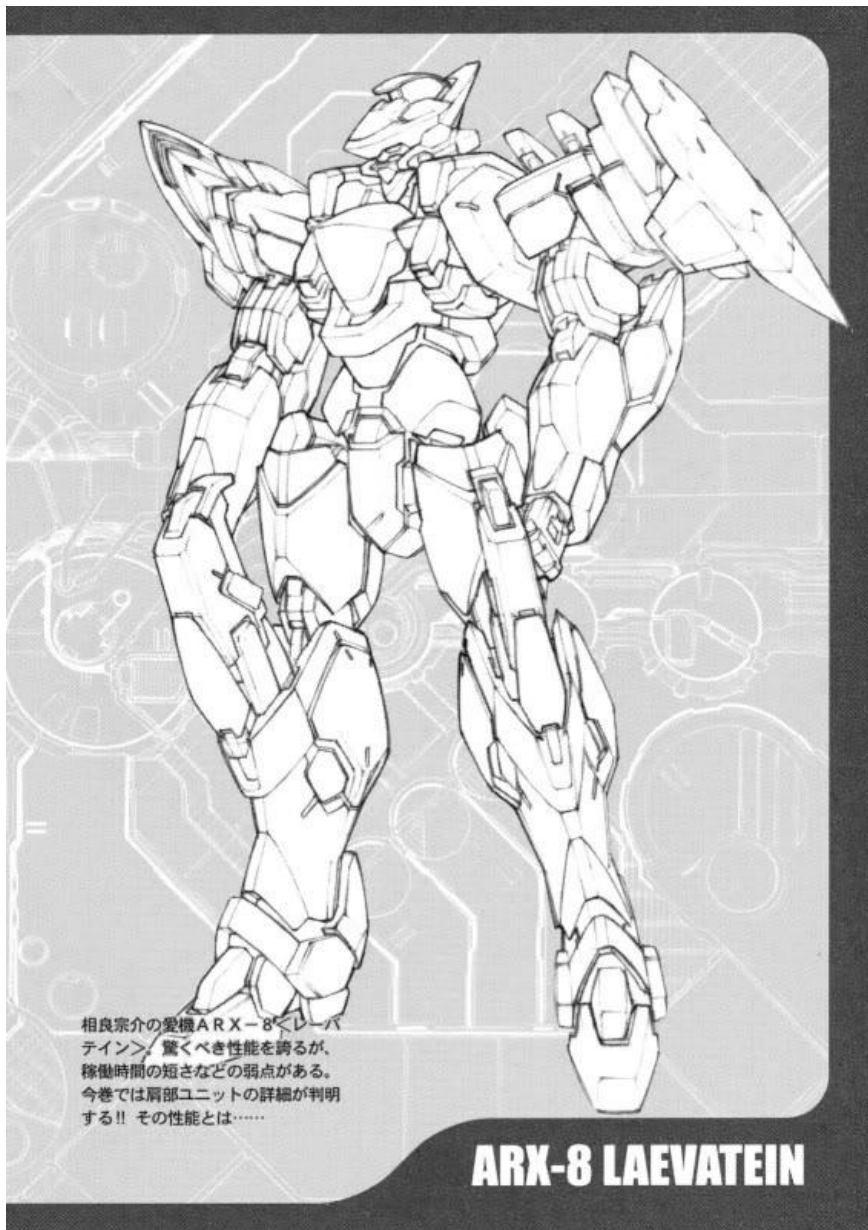
Greatest and highest TAROS. She possessed that. In order to correct the world. After ending everything, that would be the place where everything began again.

A hot violent fight- if it were to be history's last war, that island would be the center.

That island's name was Merida.

The former base of Mithril's West Pacific Fleet.

The End



Sousuke's beloved unit ARX-8 Laevatein. Proud of its surprising abilities, has a weak point in its short operating period. The details of its shoulder unit are provided in this volume!! That ability is....

Plan1065 ERIGOR

＜コダール＞シリーズの最新鋭機。
現在＜エリゴール＞は、赤色のヴ
ィルヘルム・カスパー機をはじめ、
黒色と白色の計3機が確認されて
いる。それぞれに武装が異なる

メカデザイン 海老川 兼武

Latest unit of the Codarl series. Currently the Eligor started from the red unit of Wilhelm Casper, the black and white unit are also confirmed. Has many different armaments.

Mecha Design: Ebigawa Kanetake

